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The Writing-Machine as Method: Telling Traumatic Sensation Through *Harriet*

Freya Johnson

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, School of Geographical Sciences.

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Abstract

In this dissertation I turn to writing as a method for exploring trauma as a progression of sensations, the complexity of which I argue cannot be comprehensively understood through either clinical response or theoretical models. These models, I argue, have the effect of shaping trauma by delineating what comes to count as a traumatic event, and how such events should be felt and responded to. What I put forward is a piece of work that approaches traumatic sensation in a way that is sensitive to its nuances. I focus specifically on sexual trauma, identifying sexual violence survivors as frequently having to align with the 'shape' of trauma in cultural, clinical, and juridical registers in order to appear to be presenting traumatic responses that are anticipated as 'normal'. The novel hook of this dissertation is that it moves between fiction and theory to provide an experimental plane for discussion. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the 'writing-machine' I compose the narrative – *Harriet* – in which I foreground the capacity of fiction to directly affect the way that trauma is perceived and thought about. The protagonist of *Harriet* follows the unpredictable and often unexpected sensations of her own sexual trauma, drawing attention to the idea that trauma is impossible to universally characterise. Taking further insight from Ann Cvetkovich, Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, and Henri Bergson, I complement the narrative with discussions that are separated into 'plateaus'. These plateaus move consecutively to critique existing clinical and theoretical trauma literature, provide feminist considerations for writing as a method, and – turning more closely to Deleuze – problematise the event of trauma. The overarching imperative of this dissertation is to provide relief from the 'shape' of trauma, so that all of its iterations and manifestations can be felt through on one's own terms.

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For my ‘sisters’ in sexual trauma – you know who you are. You carry so much, and wear it so well.

For my mum, who didn’t get the chance to find out what had happened to me. It might have explained a lot. I’m sorry, and I love you.

“The love expressed between women is particular and powerful because we have had to love in order to live; love has been our survival” ~ Audre Lorde

Author’s Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: .....Freya Johnson..... DATE:....January 6th 2020.....

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Prologue

This project came about because I wanted to tell a story about trauma that explores its complexity in a way that I felt didn't already exist. That is not entirely true, actually, because the works that have served as influential in the writing of this project – several of which I will discuss in this prologue – go a significant distance to thinking trauma other than what labels of, for example, post-traumatic stress disorder, permit. And that is, if I can place this project concisely, my starting premise – to examine trauma outside of existing clinical and theoretical discourse. What I refer to are two distinct but not mutually exclusive literatures – the clinical work on trauma in the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry, and the more recent academic work on trauma which has been broadly termed 'trauma studies' (Traverso and Broderick 2010, 4). Trauma studies has manifested across disciplines of literary, critical, and cultural theory in part to critique – frequently using a deconstructive approach – the cognitive chaos and disassociation described by clinical work as a response to trauma (Andermahr 2015, 500). The emergent theories from trauma studies can be thought of as an attempt to respond to 'trauma' as a clinical concept and to think about it in relation to the study of history, society, and culture, culminating in what is intended as a more responsive and sensitive discussion of the phenomena – particularly memory – associated with trauma (Balaev 2008, 150).

Throughout this project, I describe much of this existing body of work on trauma as having the effect of creating a 'shape'. By this I mean that both clinical and the (although more nuanced) theoretical literature on trauma present a certain psychological universalism that eliminates trauma's specific manifestations in order to firmly identify characteristics that can be thought of as common to all traumatic experience (Andermahr 2015, 502). What the resulting shape defines is trauma as based on catastrophic events, and a pathologising approach to traumatic responses (Craps 2013, 31). With this project, what I contribute is a consideration for how the weight of trauma is carried differently, as a felt experience that cannot be easily located temporally or spatially. Trauma is something that crops up erratically, unexpectedly, and with different intensities – sometimes it lingers subtly like a bad aftertaste, and sometimes it feels as abrupt as a punch in the face. What I talk about specifically is sexual trauma, which provides a direct challenge to the influential maxim that describes trauma as "a frightening event outside of ordinary experience" (Caruth 1995, 172). Reflecting on my own struggle as a sexual violence survivor to fit the event-based and pathological shape of trauma, I argue that sexual trauma is – like chronic back pain, or a dulling migraine – difficult and painful, but unfortunately very ordinary.

The nuances of sexual trauma are, above all else, what I consider in this project. However, they are not something that can easily be 'told' between writer and reader – they need to be felt, like trauma is felt. The methodological commitment of this project is to storytelling as a way of provoking affect, and

throughout this prologue I draw together my approach as one that uses writing as the practice of research. My most exciting and novel contribution to re-imagining trauma is through a fictive short story titled *Harriet*, in which I write a young woman's journey through sexual trauma, and which is placed between essay-style plateaus. Although the fabulation of the story is important, and is meant to be engaging, it is not its central motive. *Harriet* is intended as an expressive space for the affective drumming up of how sexual trauma is experienced and navigated. It is a writing that incites a "worldly sensibility", which is to say that it activates those sensory registers that facilitate the "more-than" of what words can describe of experience (Stewart 2015, 20). *Harriet* provides some pause for sensing the words as more of a 'doing' than 'telling' – the narrative becomes an encountering of how sexual trauma is felt, resulting in a perhaps more effective and affective way of describing what is otherwise difficult to articulate. It is this approach that makes the whole project something moving and vibrant – it becomes a thought experiment in itself.

The difference between my work and the works that have inspired this project, many of which are fiction, is that – as a PhD candidate – my starting position is an academic one. What I wanted to produce from that position was something that could put forward a story in which the focus on trauma was exploratory instead of pinpointing what trauma *is* and how it could be treated. That is the focus of clinical approaches – finding a path to the cure for trauma. It is not so much that such a focus is completely problematic, but it is limiting in the sense that it positions trauma as *pathological* – a problem in need of a cure because it deviates from an otherwise usual, or healthy condition. There are two central limiting points that can be identified here as an example. The first refers to the assumption around what denotes the usual or healthy condition of a body, and the second refers to the identifying of trauma as the deviation. The two are not mutually exclusive, of course, and the limitations come with attempts to define what comes to count as 'normal', and what comes to count as 'abnormal'. Trauma is often thought of as unusual because it strays from the somatic and psychosomatic presentations of what is considered to be a healthy, functioning body ('ordinary' eating patterns, for example, or a 'normal' processing of memory), being captured instead through a symptomatology that presents trauma as counter to that. Trauma, or being traumatised, is consequently identified as a condition – something that is out of the ordinary, and something that has disrupted those normal processes of working.

The description of trauma as a catastrophic and overwhelming event holds strong resonance as a cultural reflection of Freud's influential theory of the protective shield, which refers to the idea that a body has a barrier that is, to a certain extent, resistant to stimuli. In this model, trauma is theorised as something that is immediately and necessarily shocking and painful to that barrier. What is central to this project is decoupling trauma from connotations of shock or acute catastrophe. I draw heavily on the academic work of Ann Cvetkovich whose approach is one that foregrounds what she calls the "everydayness" of trauma in her 2003 text *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (she employs a similar approach when analysing depression in her later 2012 text *Depression: A Public*

Feeling) in order to forge some relief from the catastrophising of trauma that can be seen in clinical and theoretical literatures whose reference points have primarily been large-scale historical events such as wars or the Holocaust, and which have the effect of quieting or reducing the perceived gravitas of what Cvetkovich (2003, 3) calls more 'ordinary' sites of trauma, such as sexual and domestic violence. This needs a little explanation, because describing the ordinariness or everydayness of sexual trauma is *not* the same as minimising that trauma. Everydayness does not equate with not mattering, or to saying that the trauma is not awful. The point is that awfulness does not have to equate with catastrophe, if catastrophe is defined as a sudden, marked event. Trauma can be extremely dull, and drawn out. It can be, to employ a phrase that Lauren Berlant uses, a 'slow creep'. Thinking trauma in this way is useful to get at the felt experience of trauma, because the specificities of those encounters often escape what is delineated as a traumatic event, and what is considered a suitable response to that event, the consequence being that we end up with ideas both of what counts as legitimate trauma, and legitimate forms of suffering.

The everydayness of trauma – to continue using Cvetkovich's term for a while – is also descriptive of the prevalence of sexual violence which, I argue throughout this project, is significantly clouded by the language of trauma as shock and catastrophe, making it feel like violence is somehow external to us (and our protective shield), and which subsequently facilitates the influence of gendered tropes around women 'crying' rape, and of rape as something that happens in unfamiliar circumstances, rather than as something that is perpetuated at home by a family member or friend. Sexual violence *is* prolific, with – in the United Kingdom alone – one in five women having experienced some form of violence since the age of 16, and one in 20 children having experienced abuse (NSPCC 2019; ONS 2018). The recent rupture at the surface of popular culture, marked by movements such as #MeToo, is also evidence of the relentlessness of violence. It is predominately white, high-profile evidence, but it is evidence peeking out nonetheless. This accelerated awareness has been described as a watershed – The Weinstein Effect – and abused bodies are emerging in a wave that has not been seen since the women's liberation movement of the 1970s (see Harrison 2019, and Luscombe 2017). What is interesting is that the term 'watershed' makes it sound as though it is something that has just come into being. It's become, for the naysayers, like a game of Guess Who? Or rather, Guess Who Next? There's Harvey Weinstein of course – reminiscent of the Roman Polanski case – Jimmy Savile, Michael Brewer, Bill Cosby, Kevin Spacey, Brock Turner, Brett Kavanaugh – a reminder of Clarence Thomas – the list goes on. But these are not sudden occurrences. They are not Big Reveals. They are continuity – everydayness; ordinariness. The photograph of Virginia Giuffre with Prince Andrew that has resurfaced in the wake of the Jeffrey Epstein case is, at the very least, a small rap at a window to remind us – if we'll only look through it – that this is, and has been, going on the whole time (see Swaine 2019 on attempts to brand the now-famous photograph as fake, to protect the Prince).

The catastrophising and pathologising face of trauma is also problematic because it is what makes sexual violence appear isolatable, which is to say that it makes it easier to foster an image of its rarity. In the plateau *Writing a Body of Trauma*, I focus on how sexual violence is read in such a way that it effects the anticipation of the violent event as something that happens 'out there' in an alleyway (which, of course, it rarely does) and that responses to those events must bear the usual hallmarks – fear of death, and evidence of struggling, for example. What I discuss is how such a reading of sexual violence is marked by essentialist ideas of what constitutes the 'traumatised woman', and how this gendered perception is then used to minimise or silence claims. The cultural frames of these hallmarks take place in everyday conversation and interactions under these ideas, are echoed by the catastrophising of trauma in clinical literature, and condense perhaps most starkly in the legal context. I am, for example, writing this as news comes in of the acquittal by a Barcelona court of five men accused of raping a 14 year old girl in the town of Manresa, being convicted instead of the lesser 'sexual abuse' charge on the grounds that the girl was under the influence of drugs and alcohol (Burgen 2019). The case has been described as almost directly mirroring the *La Manada* case from earlier this year, in which another five men were similarly acquitted of raping an 18 year old woman on the grounds that direct violence was not used to coerce her (Beatley 2019). What this presents is a lack of recognition by the fine print of the law for the complex ways in which sexual violence plays out, as an overlapping continuum not easily discernible into categories that describe physical force as a prerequisite violence (Fileborn and Vera-Gray 2017, 206). Arguably, this lack of recognition is at least in part due to the fundamental rationale of a trial, which is to examine what is considered evidence (Burman 2009, 4). In the *La Manada* case, the fact that the complainant was treated for vaginal wounds was not evidence of violence enough – the filming of the rape by the complainant's assailants shows her with her eyes closed in a frozen or – as was perceived by the defence – a passive and compliant state (Rosell 2018). The compensation for the frequent lack of 'hard' evidence is predicated far too highly on the presence of behaviours that are believed appropriate responses to the 'shock' of sexual violence, and are easily overturned by defence questioning – steeped in gendered stereotyping – around the sexual history and character of the complainant (Temkin 2000, 220; Burman 2009, 16).

Identifying complainants as unreliable is a tried and tested technique of deflection to dismiss as pathology what is actually an unveiling of the prevalence and intimacy of violence. Complainants become figures to alienate in order to articulate their claims as little more than a witch hunt, with a seemingly benevolent view taken of defendants – as was reported of the Manresa case in which the judges were said to have "no difficulty seeing this from the point of view of the aggressors, but not that of the victim" (Burgen 2019, n.p.). It would be fair to say that my frustration around this issue has served as a significant motivator for this project, particularly at a time when great swathes of gaslighting are erupting from male bodies in response to global shifts in opinion regarding not only the visibility of sexual violence but also – as another pertinent example – the trivialising of figures such as Greta

Thunberg in order to desperately preserve the "Jim'll Fix It" (uncomfortable pun intended) technocratic and toxic masculinist approach to the denial of climate change (Gelin 2019).

On a more personal level, a building mound of anecdotes – including my own history of sexual abuse – has motivated me to put this piece of work together. The amount of informal disclosures that have come my direction in response to hearing about my PhD topic have been overwhelming not only because of their number and nature, but because the accounts have been so telling of the challenges of trying to pinpoint what trauma is and how it can be treated. From single incidents and assaults, to the most chronic of incest and prolonged abuse, the stories I have heard have been characterised by, well, not much actually – if 'characteristic' is defined by the marking of some normative trend. One of the predicates of the clinical and theoretical literature that I critique in this project is that trauma manifests in a pattern of fragmenting consciousness and returns, involuntarily, through repetitive phenomena such as nightmares. This is, in part, based on the assumption of the suddenness of traumatic events. But the trauma of sexual violence, if anything, is often lethargic and draining, rather than shocking and horrifying. And these are, as Cvetkovich (2003) might say, very 'everyday' sensations. My experiences, and that of my friends', have been a slow, concentrated struggle, though qualitatively different from each other. Part of the central argument of this project is that the sensation of trauma is singular – that is, it is different only to itself, and cannot be explained exhaustively via response models such as PTSD, or theoretical models that place it within ideas of psychological disassociation and fragmentation. These models represent what I call the 'shaping' of trauma, which delineates what comes to count as a traumatic event, and how such events should be felt and responded to. When sharing our experiences of sexual violence, what I have learned from my friends is that very little of our feelings corroborate with such a shape. How we have processed and worked through our respective traumas have been contingent on the affective relations and encounters specific to our daily lives, and not dependent on an internal psyche – the assumed reality of which is thought to express symptoms that are common to all traumatic experience.

In the shaping of trauma, what follows on from identifying what constitutes trauma and how it should be felt is an establishment of what is thought to help the individual back to happiness. However – following Sara Ahmed (2010) – what I problematise is the possibility of knowing in advance what happiness looks like, and how to get there. In my experiences of therapy as a technique of healing what I found difficult was the reliance on a sort of problem-requires-treatment formula, that is, identifying the things that felt bad and trying to figure out how to get 'back on track' and stop feeling those things. I always found the conversation of recovery to be quite trite and contrived – how would I know when I had recovered? The pathological starting point of figuring a body as unusual (derailed from 'the track') as a result of violent experiences is an inescapably negative one. It is negative not because it is incorrect in diagnosing that sexual violence is a really shitty thing to have gone through – it is negative because, within this approach, whichever way you might move 'forward', you are always irrevocably marked by

'trauma' as a determinable starting point. I have been captured by Cvetkovich's (2003, 113) discussions of radical lesbianism which turns this approach on its head because she explores how expressions of eroticism, such as s/m and power play, do not need to be stamped out as perverted consequences of having been through violence but can instead be mechanisms of 'feeling better' (whatever that might look like) in themselves. Returning to the sisterhood that I have found myself in as survivors of violence, we have been galvanised in different ways by our experiences, and our styles of making ourselves feel better are irreducible to the sort of happiness that might erase practices, ideas, and feelings that don't sit within normative values.

This project is one of my ways of making myself feel better. Its key theme is transformation, or the Deleuzian term that I will use throughout – becoming. The most significant thing about any becoming is that it is generative of another way of being that comes about through the function of affective influences rather than resemblances (see Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 320-334). The problem-requires-treatment formula I mentioned a moment ago relies on the recognition of what 'health' or 'happiness' looks like in order to identify what is unhealthy or unhappy. Here, becoming is exploratory – it is a way to feel out trauma as I go along. It is not about trying to find a cure because that necessitates knowing what the problem is in the first place. In other words, I do not use this project to identify all of the ways that sexual violence can fuck you up in order to write a prescriptive manifesto for a sort of catch-all recovery. This project is precisely that – a project; a process. It is vulnerable, in a sense, because I'm not trying to decide where it's going to go, and that is so that I can keep the terms for debate open. By saying that, I don't mean to imply that the arguments I put forward are weak – I don't think they are – I just mean that the project by its very nature is open-ended. It is a practice – a practice of working on myself, and of working through and on trauma as a concept. When starting this project I realised that I needed to develop a method appropriate to such a practice which turned out, perhaps unsurprisingly, to be writing; writing expressively, writing speculatively, and writing thoughtfully. In the section that follows, I will provide some reflections on what that means, and describe what has come to be a writing-as-practice project.

Telling Trauma (or working out how to)

It was not possible, I decided, for me to talk about trauma without talking about my experiences. That sounds pretty obvious, given that I have already stated that one of the motivational factors for this project is my history of abuse, however it feels necessary to make it clear because of how difficult it can be to visibly discuss something so personal in an academic context without facing charges of being indulgent, and without it being framed as a vulnerability that renders the research as useless if conventional understandings of what counts as research are relied upon (Mountz *et al* 2015, 1237; Humphreys 2005, 844). In Pamela Moss' 2001 text *Placing Autobiography in Geography*, she discusses

the tendency in research to hide forms of 'personal' writing because they throw up all the usual caveats about what critical value there can possibly be within creative, memoir, or autobiographical expression. Within geography specifically, she argues that autobiography has always lurked as a necessary way of chronicling and recording research sites, the building of maps, and the emergence of trends of thinking (Moss 2001, 7). However, particularly with the influx of qualitative research methods literature that is intended to assist the development of social science research studies, it seems today to be easier to extract the personal influence upon the research and isolate it to sections titled 'reflexivity' and 'positionality' which always appear to me as slightly awkward ways of getting around the fact that it is impossible to separate the researcher from the research (Moss 2001, 8). Moss (2001, 10) is concerned exclusively with autobiography as a writing technique, but when she says "autobiography is not only…an approach to research", I feel that the sentiment resonates with all writing techniques. Writing *is* the research, we might say.

I have been asked, not infrequently, how my project fits in with geography as a discipline, partly because of the seeming lack of traditional empirical evidence. However, the geography that I sit in line with is one that questions the methodological conservatism of collecting 'data', as if it were possible to isolate and package up all of the sensations of life (Latham 2003, 1994). It has been over the last two decades that there has been a marked shift in how we frame what geography is concerned with, which has resulted in a widening of the methodological horizon in order to re-consider what comes to count as valuable research (Latham 2003, 1995). This is positioned upon a critique of the idea that there is such a thing as a foundational structure upon which scientific knowledge can be based, rather than considering world/s as made up of differing processes (Latham 2003, 1997). Methods that actively engage with this need to be sensitive to the flow of things by responding through encounter with what is being researched (Dewsbury 2003, 1908). One of the most significant discussions that have taken place in geography is the capacity of performative research methods such as writing, sounding, and imaging to do just that – to act as modes of experimentation that engage in the moment with the active creation of relations between both things and processes (Dewsbury 2000, 493; see also Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Dewsbury 2010; also Phelan 1996). The performative, JD Dewsbury (2000, 493) writes, invokes our need to realise that "we are always thinking on our feet", which is to say that research need not be concerned with determining essence or nature, but can respond instead to movement and transformation. In this project, writing is a performance. I do not look to contribute to the existing clinical corpus that adheres to ideas of trauma that have already been shaped and pronounced – I act trauma as I go, responding to my own existence, and my own experiences, and letting that set the rhythm and the tone of the research. This project's theme of transformation – or becoming – is enabled by writing performatively because such writing presents as what Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2013, 12) would call 'mapping', that is, the writing moves and connects with thoughts and ideas that problematise fixed notions in order to help fresh thought to come through. Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2013, 12)

stay with cartographic language to clarify this, positioning mapping as antithetical to tracing – stating that mapping is about finding a way that is not traceable back to what they call "the same". In other words, mapping is not dependant on resemblance (for example, resembling existing ideas of what the event of trauma is, and how it should feel). What I write, then, is a sort of map – a finding of my way through trauma that evades existing clinical narratives (see also Pile and Thrift 1995, 1-47 on "mapping as wayfinding" and "mapping the subject").

Posturing this project as performative of the things I have mentioned – as open-ended, transformative, and as a way of mapping – makes it sound like it could come across as messy. That is not altogether a bad thing, as I didn't intend for the writing to be linear and solution-focused, however I was still left with the problem of how to style the approach. I thought for a while about engaging almost exclusively with a modular, vignette style of writing, similar to that of Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*, and Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart's joint text *The Hundreds* in which the authors present a series of snapshots of daily life that, as they write, follow "out the impact of things" in the sense that the words amplify shifts in situations and atmospheres to draw attention to the affective specificities of encounters. This would have been an effective technique to get across a sense of traumatic sensation as singular, however it didn't leave much room for my original intention – which was to tell a story about trauma. I imagined this story unfolding through longer swathes of theoretical discussion that would draw on both literature and my experiences to unpick the clinical shaping of trauma and, increasingly, I also wanted to find a role for fictional storytelling specifically. What I needed, then, was to remedy more than one style in order to effectively negotiate three levels of conversation – a level of memoir mixed in with academic discussion, and fictional narrative.

An Academic Memoir

In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Cvetkovich (2012, 78) provides some thoughts on memoir as a research method, describing her work as a sort of "laboratory for ideas". What she is keen to develop – and this has rubbed off on me – is memoir as a technique of process-based writing, whereby the ends don't necessarily have to meet and, actually, the "rough edges" of which can be precisely what stimulates new thinking (Cvetkovich 2012, 77). The 'everydayness' of trauma that Cvetkovich (2012, 76-77) wants to make visible is indeed made well visible through her practice of memoir, because it is the inclusion of her thoughts, asides, and feelings that are disruptive of the usual continuous style of academic writing, with its "careful transitions" and "literary polish", which place strictures on how complex topics such as trauma are engaged with and thought through. What memoir also permits, Cvetkovich (2012, 77) suggests, is the making of claims that are speculative and personal, and the ability of those claims to be regarded as forms of truth. The truthfulness in the writing – in my writing – can be found in anecdotes, and stories, suspicions, and hunches. This is, as Cvetkovich (2012, 77) writes, a way of pushing against the academic imperative to evidence claims in a way that is separate

from personal experience – instead, this writing can be regarded as what Patricia Clough and Talha İşsevenler (2016, 15) call "worlding worlds with words"; it is a writing that writes truth into being by drawing on the intimate connection between experience and concepts (Donovan and Moss 2017, 4; Wyatt *et al* 2011, 253). Within the particular topic of trauma, it is the attempt by clinical and theoretical literatures to provide a universal model of trauma's event and effects that does not sit that well with me because it separates that connection, and it is my different experiences that have generated the hunches. This is the evidence from which I begin.

Memoir is often described in a confessional sense, which I am keen to detach from in this piece of work because it suggests that I think what I write is simply a self-examination, and that self-examination is something that needs to be apologised for (Atlas 1996). It is oddly theological to brand a conversation about the self as indulgent, and as deservedly generative of guilt and shame. To proceed with begging the reader for forgiveness, or "redemption", which is – as Moss (2001, 10) notes – so common in autobiographical writing, would be to undercut the value of what I am trying to say. If, for example, the poetry of Audre Lorde or the feminist theory of bell hooks were stripped of their personal inflections, then their work would not be seen as such powerful resistances. To turn to a more specific example – the historical analysis of sexuality in Eve Sedgwick's 1994 collection of essays, *Tendencies*, would be bereft without the text being positioned also as a memoir-esque exploration of Sedgwick's own sexuality. Another reason to push back against the claim of memoir as confessional is that it positions the reader – as Atlas (1996) notes – as a *voyeur*. Again, this calls up a sense of guilt and shame by suggesting that the reader is a simple bystander – a looker-in who is in no way bound up with the content of the work, and that the work itself is revealing of something shameful. Here, the writing is certainly an exposure, but what I suggest is that the shame of that exposure doesn't have to be perceived negatively. Throughout this project I discuss shame as an affect of proximity, that is, it is about bodies being close to one another, and I talk about how that proximity is generative of heat – an energy – between bodies. What this does is frame shame as productive precisely because it is about being exposed and being vulnerable to others who are not simply looking-in at the work, in a benign, voyeuristic sense, but are involved in the shame insofar as they are exposed to it themselves. By extension, what this also does is further highlight how the research is inextricable from not only myself, as the researcher, but also from the readers.

Memoir, then, as a writing technique, assists in locating my audience, and keeping them close. In Leigh Gilmore's 2001 text *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* she writes that composing research that is memoir in tone is an opportunity to stand for others, because it gives the writer the chance to use a voice that might not otherwise be heard in more traditional forms of writing research, and how the presence of that voice facilitates a resonating with readers in terms of their experiences. I am careful here, however, not to overstate the transformative political potential of telling this project from a place of experience. This is one of the guiding principles of Tanya Serisier's 2018 text *Speaking*

Out: Feminism, Rape, and Narrative Politics, in which Serisier (2018a, 4) notes that the feminist anti-rape belief that disseminating a genre of experiential narratives can end sexual violence must come with considerations for the politics surrounding that dissemination, including the relations between survivors, and the motives behind facilitating the visibility of the stories. With this in mind, it might be more sensitive to say that I speak *with* others, and not on behalf of – or for – them. I cannot speak for a universality of experience because the possibility of such an idea is one that I seek to undo with this work. In particular, I speak with – and not for – the women whose voices motivated me during my time of writing. When I imagine who my audience for this project might be, I think of who I have written it for. I have written it not only for those particular women – my friends – but for anyone who might be muddling their way through their own trauma. Critically, I have also written this project for myself. It is intended as a reminder of the rough edges and odd trajectories of trauma, and some of that reminder lies in its style – which is as open-ended and process-based, not neat and polished. It is, like Cvetkovich (2003) describes of her own work, a repository of feelings and affects – the writing down of which in a patchwork sort of structure has enabled me to work through them, and to present my thoughts as a guide for trauma that is 'how-to' without being instructive. By this I mean that I put forward a discussion that pushes against universalising and clinical assumptions around trauma and that, in doing so, I hope to lift from others the pressure to 'do' trauma correctly so that trauma can be felt, and lived, on their own terms.

What I am also aware of is that the academic tone of the project – given that it is to be submitted for a doctorate title – precludes from reading many of the eyes that I would like to reach because much of the specialist lexicon is difficult to get around. To ease this a little, memoir has been helpful in framing the essay discussion with a conversational tone, providing an inroad to an alternative scholarship whereby the insertion of knowledge from ordinary life reveals my emotional investment in the project and makes it – hopefully – more 'readable'. In other work, this can be seen in Cvetkovich's (2012, 23) writing on depression, in which her turn to memoir as a technique is – amongst other things – an attempt to imbibe the writing with an account that convincingly reduces the perceived importance of pharmaceutical treatment for depression, by explaining the relief she found for her own depression via small shifts and activities she engaged with in her ordinary daily life. Two other examples to turn to are, firstly, Jill Dolan's blog *The Feminist Spectator*, which provides a more immediate performative outlet for her cultural critique, and is one that does not shy away from the effect that felt experience has on the formation of those critiques. She includes reviews of theatre, film, and television, and also uploads her academic articles to enable open access (See Dolan [2012] for a particularly engaging entry with an 'emotional archive' of anecdotes that help her express her lesbian feminism). The second example is Sara Ahmed's more frequently updated blog *Feminist Killjoys* in which she informally presents complex theoretical concepts that are heavily supported by personal experiences and anecdotes; the result is a rich platform of discussion that is critical whilst being as accessible as possible

(see especially Ahmed [2019a] on how nodding is used as a political gesture with which to either dismiss or affirms complaints in the academic institution).

What memoir actually looks like throughout this project is varied. It is at times more explicit, but mostly it is a fairly opaque expression – such as how it has been presented throughout this prologue so far. The bulk of it proceeds as less memoir *and* essay, and more memoir-essay – I haven't really written exclusive sections that are dedicated to memoir in style, and placed them between equally exclusive academic sections. The closest I have got to this is in the plateau *Writing a Body of Trauma* in which I include what I have called 'images' that are intended as fragments of experience which illustrate and support the more formal discussion. I wrote these fragments as part of a long experimentation with creative writing style that took place alongside the planning of the project as a whole, and I think that the inclusion of them signposts the tone of the work as something that is concerned with the wider, affective forces that are instrumental to how trauma is felt out. One of the realisations I arrived at when writing them is how much the trauma of my Mum's death pokes through when trying to work through the trauma of my abuse. Mum died of cancer a few weeks before my 18th birthday, and she fell ill when I was 15 – just before I went through approximately a year of abuse by a man who was much older than me, and who had a penchant for plying the teenagers of my village with drugs and booze. Those years are particularly shadowy for me, and recovering from them was marked by a stiff ambivalence – ambivalence about the abuse, and ambivalence about both Mum's illness and her death, which was understandably met by anger from my family who, at the time, didn't have the full picture of what was going on. That ambivalence comes across in the matter-of-fact tone of those fragments, and I think that – on reflection – the trauma of Mum's death haunts the writing of the whole project more than I first thought it might. It is further evidence that trauma is difficult to catch and encapsulate. The insertion of these pieces of writing are representative of the messy way with which I stumble through these traumas, and such messiness is, I feel, what qualifies the describing of this work as 'memoir', rather than the neat chronological style characteristic of autobiography. It is a memoir of my years – 15 to 19 – which I remember both well, and not at all.

It is important to reiterate that I use writing to attend to the sensation of trauma as singular in order to push against universalising assumptions around trauma. This is the very strong Deleuzian sense which underpins this project. However, it also reveals a tension between memoir as a writing technique, and Deleuzian ethics. Any conversation about a body, from a Deleuzian viewpoint, extends beyond, and is not reducible to, personal experience (Goodchild 1997, 43). The idea of a complete subject is problematic in Deleuzian thought because it is suggestive of the economic, social, and cultural determinations that produce the subject as such, which in turn closes down the capacity of the subject to become anything else (Goodchild 1997, 44). After five years of a very heavy scholarship in Deleuze, it is certainly the case that it has taken me a long time to remedy what has been called his "dissolution of the subject" (Smith 1997, xxix) with a project that is deeply personal. The conclusion that I have

come to is that it does not have to mean that Deleuze is not the 'right' theoretical lens for the project. In fact, I see it as the opposite. Deleuze decentralises the subject without making the subject less important. The subjectification of the traumatised body is precisely what contains the body within, for example, a specific set of symptoms. Muddling a way through trauma in this project by disabling its 'shape' is a way to resist those determinations. The implication of this for the story of trauma that I tell is that it *is* my story, but it is not my story *alone.* It is a story of sensations that spread between different bodies – this is a sentiment that I will return to throughout the coming plateaus. Writing in this way opens the project up to consider new paths of thought that are not captured within essentialised ideas of 'trauma' or the 'traumatised woman' that I mentioned earlier. It is this approach that helps the project remain committed to the creativity of becoming – the possibility of which is expressed perhaps most clearly through the fictional narrative, *Harriet*, that I have folded in between the other plateaus of the project.

Writing *Harriet*

The most opaque of memoir-expression in this project comes with the inclusion of *Harriet*. Originally, I thought about writing the narrative as an attempt to implicitly speak about my experiences, avoiding having to address myself directly. I quickly turned away from this idea, however, because I realised that the value of speaking my history explicitly would complement the otherwise academic discussion by – as I have already suggested – using anecdotes as a tool for critique upon the clinical literatures, and by increasing the accessibility of the text. *Harriet* then became something that emerged from both the Deleuzian theory that I was reading, and from other fictional narratives that were centred on trauma that I was also reading. It became something that was an active 'doing' of the project, rather than being positioned as a disguised re-writing of my own experiences. It became something that could grow its own legs.

In a later plateau titled *Harriet and the Writing-Machine* I delve into the thick of the Deleuzian philosoph" that streaks through the narrative, but in this particular discussion I focus on the development of a writing-as-practice project, and so what I will talk about in more detail instead is the process I went through in order to get *Harriet* written. Once I had discarded with the idea of using fiction as a censored testimonial opportunity, I started to consider more carefully what role fiction could have for the project. Fiction is generally considered as something that isn't real, and is produced as an activity of the imagination. However, such a description is somewhat paradoxical because fiction *is* real – it exists in the material sense as an object, and it can be defined by its capacity to change the course of the reader, viewer, or listener's thinking which will, in turn, have material consequences. I have said from the beginning of this plateau that I wanted to 'tell a story' about trauma and 'storytelling', here, holds a powerful functionality. Drawing on the afterword of Dorothy Allison's semi-autobiographical novel – *Bastard Out of Carolina* – which provides an account of surviving incest, Allison ([1992] 2012, 317)

talks about how fiction closes the gap between the text and the reader because of the careful attention to prose that can seemingly knot the reader's stomach and make them *feel* that 'this is real', 'this happened'. This, for Allison, is why fiction is such an important technique for making visible the reality of sexual violence. Stories are what she calls "true lies" – their affective power gets under your skin far more than an academic or non-fiction narrative (Allison [1992] 2012, 317). Telling a story about trauma, then, in the way that I want to tell it, is intended to directly affect the way that trauma is perceived by the reader. In Simon O'Sullivan's (2017, 309) chapter from the edited collection *Fiction as Method*, he writes that fiction, as a performative art practice, is capable of permitting a glimpse of difference within a world that is, arguably, always already fictional. It is a more imaginative glimpse than might otherwise be possible and so can be described – as Patricia Leavy (2016, 20) puts it – a more *engaged* way for both writer and reader to re-examine the worlds that are lived in. In any case, 'trauma' can already be thought of as a story; it is a story that is told through literatures, and through practitioners – both medical and therapeutic – who frame it as catastrophic and as precipitous of particular symptoms. Trauma is also a story that is told through public and cultural practices, when decisions are made around which traumas are considered significant, and when gendered perceptions are used to mark out who is responsible for sexual violence. The story of trauma that I tell, is one of trauma as impossible to universally characterise; it is awkward, unpredictable, and often difficult to locate.

Fiction, then, fits with the transformative theme of the project in that it is intended to be generative of thinking trauma outside of the stories that are already told about it. There are a few reasons that I have engaged with fiction explicitly, and not just stuck with academic memoir exclusively as a form of storytelling in itself. The first reason is that fiction offers a platform of experimentation that is, to a certain extent, otherwise limited in the project. The way that I have mixed portions of memoir with theoretical discussion is also experimental, but to fully engage with fiction gives me more creative license to play around with figures, effects, and sensations, in order to break apart the shape of trauma in a perhaps more visceral way. The anthropologist Michael Taussig is well-known for a similar storytelling approach to research; the text of his that I am most familiar with is his 2004 work *My Cocaine Museum*, in which he constructs a fictive museum which is written through a chain of loosely juxtaposed 'artefacts' in order to frame his ethnographic research of the lives of Afro-Colombian gold miners who have been drawn into cocaine production and trafficking. Taussig's modular style of composition makes the reader feel as though they are walking through the rooms of a museum, and his fictional narratives – drawn from research anecdotes – bring the reader closer, affectively, to the topic. Writing *Harriet*, for me, is a way of making the topic of trauma similarly more tactile and workable. Like clay, I feel like I can bend it in any direction I want and see what shapes come up. This in itself feels kind of like a breathing space, which is another reason for turning to fiction. It is a way for me to 'have fun' with trauma (for want of a better phrase) which, in turn, makes the whole project more engaging and accessible for the reader.

Developing the narrative, however, has not been easy – both in terms of creating the storyline and deciding on a writing style. Claiming that fiction has been a wholly experimental platform for trauma is not altogether true, simply because – in writing *Harriet* – there is necessarily my thinly veiled self within the story, although it is less visible than it is in the rest of the project. The narrative tells of Harriet's survival of childhood abuse from her brother, and it traces her life as a young adult dealing with the trauma of that abuse. Harriet's story is different from my own in the sense that her trauma is a result of incest, but the similarities come with much of her emotional development as she ages. Like me, Harriet doesn't 'fit' the shape of trauma as catastrophic – as something that feels horrifying or shocking. What she experiences instead is a slower and much more lethargic creep of emotions that at first seem at odds with – but are actually the motivator for – the chaotic and raucous life that she builds for herself in London away from her family. What I wanted to get across was a sense of Harriet's life as a steady trickle of grief and trauma that manifests in ways that are not necessarily dramatic, even if seemingly dramatic things happen (and they do). To do this, I have presented the narrative as *continuous* – as unmarked by sudden ruptures as possible; this is achieved through the stream-like writing style that I outline in the next couple of paragraphs. *Harriet* is not intended to comply with the traditional beginning-middle-end structure that might ordinarily be punctuated with a crescendo that readers come to anticipate as the usual formula for a story. I have avoided this because such a structure runs the risk of reducing the writing to an expression of meanings that have already been decided based on the model of recognition I was problematising earlier – the problem-requires-treatment formula that depends on knowing in advance what 'happiness' looks like – in this case such as Harriet meeting 'the man of her dreams' as a satiating and normative resolution to her troubled story. The clinical structuring of trauma already uses a beginning-middle-end formula in order affirm what trauma is thought to look and feel like – it is presented as a problem (beginning and middle) in need of a solution, or cure (ending). Instead, in *Harriet* trauma is something that is woven into her life, and the story is about how she carries it, and about her learning how to use her body in ways that feel good to her. As such, the story trails off without suggestions of how to resolve trauma, or even suggestions that trauma must be resolved at all. It doesn't have a 'happy' ending, or any ending, really. This is because I maintain a non-pathologising and exploratory approach to trauma – I turn away from assumptions of what a conclusive happiness must look like, or what trajectory Harriet's life must take beyond the story. *Harriet* stops just as easily as it could continue – the end is expressed as more of a pause that is meant to lean outwards and towards further potential explorations of trauma.

The writing style for *Harriet* took a long time to settle on. I wanted to stay away from the denser, detailed style of prose characteristic of many novels and stories in order to move toward a more immediately expressive mode of writing. I had an article published earlier this year in the journal *GeoHumanities*, which I wrote while going through the process of developing this writing style that I called, after Deleuze and Guattari, *machinic.* In the article, I explain that machinic writing is an attempt

to disrupt the sense and signification that is ordinarily conveyed through writing – such as established points of view, or perceived qualities about something – by writing immediately, without thinking (Johnson 2019, 55). The point is to try and access a moment of pure expression that hasn't yet been folded into the motifs and refrains that are turned to in order to represent the world. It is this that permits the writing, as Deleuze ([1968] 2014, 182) states, to speak the world as a problem of fragments. Fundamentally, that is the message that I am trying to convey about trauma – that it is not totalisable; it is a problem of fragments instead. Machinic writing, then, became a task with which to *write* rather than write *about* trauma – providing some relief from thinking trauma in terms of the 'story' already used to describe it. I continued with this task for a fair while, writing fractured pieces that weren't about very much at all – they described, in a chaotic way, a sense of my everyday world, affected as it is by trauma. I became worried that I had bitten off a little more than I could chew, or that I was simply a terrible writer, because not a lot of it made any sense (even though I knew that was, in part, the point). Some comfort came, however, when, alongside this writing practice, I began to investigate other authors – many for whom trauma is a topical focus. It was at this point that I started to piece together my writing style with ideas for the story.

I was already familiar – having grown up an avid reader – with a fair amount of classic experimental writing such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Franz Kafka, and I revisited a lot of their work while trying to find a path to my narrative. What I came across along the way that was new to me were a series of women authors who came to affect my style of writing significantly. Most prominently, these authors include Toni Morrison, Dorothy Allison, Kathy Acker, Clarice Lispector, Beryl Fletcher, and Eimear McBride. What I saw in the work of these women were stylistic flairs that I had desperately been looking for. It sounds like a bit of a cheap shot, but – at the most rudimentary level – I needed a peek at what 'good' experimental writing looked like, and I needed some examples of styles that I could try on with my machinic writing so that I could start to direct it a bit. Morrison and Allison stand out as the most conventional in form and style of writing – by this I mean that they both conform, for the most part, to syntactical and grammatical structure within their sentences, and their texts feature clearly defined plots. What captures me about both authors is that they resist writing reductive accounts of sexual violence that are removed from social contexts. Allison writes particularly uncompromisingly, drawing the thread of her own history of incest through her novels to talk about problems of class – particularly her own southern 'white trash' origins – and to present an account of lesbian sexuality that avoids being framed as a pathological symptom of trauma (Cvetkovich 2003, 35). Similarly unapologetic is Morrison's approach, whose focus on sexual violence in her novels is presented as symptomatic of racial oppression in America (see especially Morrison [1970] 2016, and [1987] 2007). What she details is not only white-on-black rape as an explicit expression of white dominance, but also (and perhaps more frequently) black-on-black abuse and incest as indicative of the troubling ruptures

that, in her stories, appear within black communities as they struggle to navigate the limitations placed upon them by a racist culture.

I draw from the political urgency of Allison and Morrison, and it is from their work that I have the confidence to write trauma without being delicately censored over the details – not only in terms of writing explicit scenes, but in terms of how to present Harriet as a character. I am not creating a story that places Harriet as an innocent body to whom trauma simply *happens*. Note that this is *not* the same as shifting accountability – what happens to Harriet is not, and never is, her fault. But Harriet is not an innocent body in the sense that she is intimately bound up with her experiences, and the way that she responds to those experiences are revealing of her character and her sexuality. Sometimes – and I explore this at a couple of points throughout the project – rape narratives appear to need to be sanitised of all of the survivors' own urges, thoughts, and feelings, in order for them to be considered credible. This is a narrative that isn't narrowed or sanitised, because I am not trying to amplify Harriet as a victim who can only be sympathised with if she expresses qualities that are thought to be worth any sympathy. When I write about things like Harriet's softness towards her brother as a child, or her sexual curiosity, they are not to be framed as consequences of her trauma – they *are* her character. Her behaviour is informed, but not dominated by, what has happened to her. By doing this, I open a space in which to explore taboo topics, and to suggest that what might be considered unpalatable about Harriet are actually ordinary behaviours, and might resonate with other survivors, too. I draw this approach primarily from Kathy Acker, whose work is rife with characters and protagonists who could be considered 'anti-heroic' because they do not present as necessarily likeable. In *Blood and Guts in High School* the protagonist, Janey, suffers the most abhorrent of abuse at the hands of her father and his friends, however, Acker's famously loud and explosive writing style foregrounds Janey's own chaotic sexuality, tendencies, and misbehaviours. What I think is important here is that Harriet, like Janey, is given an autonomy – they are neither reducible to nor extractable from their trauma, and their responses – however frantic – cannot be considered pathological.

Acker's work is exceptionally graphic and violent which is, in part, her feminist imperative against logocentric thought, and which earned her much criticism during her lifetime and posthumously (Kraus 2017; see also Friedman 1989). It is necessary here, however, to draw a distinction between what might be dismissed as obscene or vulgar, and explicit writing that serves a political purpose. What I take from Acker is the urgency with which to get the reader to look at violence without glorifying or making a voyeuristic spectacle out of it. It is uncomfortable, but it is intended to familiarise the reader with the intimacy of violence in order to dispel the notion that violence takes place 'out there' – an act of turning away from that which is difficult to look at. This is not, however, the limit of this bold, and exposed style of writing. Inspired by Beryl Fletcher's sex-positive writing in *The Silicon Tongue* (1996), and *The Word Burners* (1991), in which sex scenes are refreshingly centred on women feeling less selfish about taking pleasure from a partner, I wanted to be able to use graphic language to give pleasure, too,

to Harriet. Again, this is not obscenity for the sake of obscenity. *Harriet* is intended to open up to trauma in a way in which nothing, really, is off-limits for discussion. I wanted to extend this de-pathologising approach to allow Harriet to go off in search of her own satisfaction, to show what her body is capable of achieving. It was also an opportunity to write my own positive sex, the kind of sex that I don't get to see or read nearly often enough outside of the heteronormative male gaze. Harriet's sexual encounters are written with the same openness as the rest of the narrative – I have tried to create the sense that there is nowhere to hide, and no need to hide, either, because all of the weird and awkward ways that sex plays out – with its sounds and smells – are to be embraced rather than erased from the account.

It is Clarice Lispector and Eimear McBride who have directly influenced the style of prose that I have used. Lispector has been instrumental in helping me set the slow pace of *Harriet*; her work is exceptional in drawing out long moments and describing small dramas in a sobering and almost languishing way. As an example, her most famous work, *The Passion According to G.H.*, is pre-occupied entirely with the often erudite monologue of a woman, G.H, who is in crisis after having crushed a cockroach in the door of a wardrobe. Not a lot seems to happen for the duration of the novel, and what does happen melds into a swirling and elusive Kafkaesque background, in which you are never really that sure of what is going on. Drawing on this rhythm I turned, finally, to McBride, to get at her immediacy and in-the-moment style which matched, most closely, with my machinic writing. McBride's two novels – *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, and *The Lesser Bohemians* – are both about young women navigating their lives during and after periods of sexual violence, so there was a strong topical similarity, but what I have observed most closely is how McBride's writing feels like it is coming straight out of a body without an editor. It could be described as a stream of consciousness, but I think it is a lot more than that – there is an unabridged foregrounding of sensation and continuity. With this, I started to practice, essentially, writing things as I heard them – writing small monologues and allowing the words to be punctuated by descriptions of my environment around me, both sights and sounds. Eventually, my slightly jerky machinic writing started to look a lot more expressive and performative. I felt like I had the beginnings of a style that was fractured and fragmented, but was also alert and responsive to the nuances that I knew would be important to transmit to the reader. Finally, and with a vague idea for the trajectory of the plot, I started to write the narrative.

A Guide for Reading

Once I had all of the parts of the project – the academic discussion mixed with memoir, and the fiction – what was left was to put the whole thing together. I have organised it in such a way that it follows a flow of ideas, but the reason that I have called the sections 'plateaus' is because, following Deleuze and Guattari's ([1987] 2013) structure of *A Thousand Plateaus*, they could be read in any order, if you wanted to. It might be that it all sits a little awkwardly together, but I intend for the structure to put

pressure on conventional styles of research in order to be exploratory. I have said before that this project is not solution-focused; it is intended as an animator and an energiser of thought – of thinking trauma a little differently. Mostly, what I hope for is that the research will be vibrant and exciting to read. It is very easy to paint a bleak picture when discussing something as dark as sexual violence and, while I do not discount the value of feeling miserable from time to time, I suggest that there is somewhere to *go* with such thoughts and feelings. This project is not supposed to be simply an analysis of the limitations of existing trauma research – it is not intended as a lengthy description of a problem. What I set out to do was identify the 'shape' of trauma, and to challenge or 'un-write' that shape by producing thoughts about trauma, and by producing trauma itself, in a sense. It is a performance – a practice of working through trauma, which I intend to stand as a sort of evidence of the limitations of how trauma is already thought. Because of that, in the discussion I tend to favour speaking frankly and openly rather than being suggestive. For example, the content – particularly in *Harriet* – can be graphic, but this is balanced by other types of discussion, such as the epilogue, in which I put forward some ideas that I spent time thinking about while writing the project. Here, I consider alternative approaches to traditional talking-therapy, such as dance and movement, in order to think through which techniques might be effective enablers of 'feeling better' for survivors of violence.

In Plateau 1, I provide an historical background of the clinical literature on trauma, and of the development of trauma studies as a body of theoretical work that emerged in the 1990s. I centre the discussion on the work of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, and Ann Cvetkovich. The reason for this is to trace the development of trauma conceived as a catastrophic event that is caught up in a fixed past which returns to haunt the survivor repeatedly – this characterises it as a repressive and dissociative phenomena. This influential theory owes much to the work of – not exclusively, but significantly – Freud and Caruth. Cvetkovich stands as a critical point of departure from this line of thought, and her de-medicalising and de-pathologising approach to trauma is one I draw upon heavily. Towards the end of the plateau I extend upon Cvetkovich's work to include ideas from Deleuze and Bergson by way of setting the theoretical tone for the rest of the project. What I put forward is an approach that thinks trauma as having a 'thisness' – a singular sensation that will always be different, even if only very slightly, to anything that has been felt before. This, in turn, mobilises thinking trauma as 'movement', that is, it does not need to be thought in terms of states (like the fixed past that is always recognisable as such) but is instead continuously shifting in difference. Using this to interrupt the 'shape' of trauma consequently makes it difficult to figure certain bodies or responses as unusual if they don't 'fit' the shape, because trauma is relieved from having a fixed reference point.

Plateau 2 is a continuation, to a certain extent, of the first plateau's literature review in that it focuses on the historical construction of the 'traumatised woman' and how this effects sexual violence being read in a gendered way. The implications this has upon the perceived reliability of survivors' narratives, I argue, reinforces the shaping of trauma. To support this, I turn to my own experiences of being figured

as a 'traumatised woman', and how this affected how my abuse was viewed by those around me, and how it informed strategies of 'healing' in therapy. It is in this plateau that I also provide a detailed and theoretically informed discussion of writing as a methodological commitment with which to interrupt ideas of what the event of trauma *is* and how it *should* feel, and to write trauma outside of totalised categories – such as essentialised femininity, and fragmentation or disassociation of the psyche.

Plateau 3 shifts direction a little to focus on the theoretical underpinnings of *Harriet*, which is something that I have not really touched on in this prologue in favour of foregrounding the process of writing. It is in this plateau that I place my writing most closely with the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari to present *Harriet* as an example of what they might call a 'writing-machine'. The writing-machine is a more concise way of describing writing as a method that is committed to lifting trauma from its shape – in *Harriet* the writing-machine is an attempt to write not the *likeness* of trauma (since that would only reaffirm what is already thought to be known about trauma), but the *sensation* of trauma, as it happens in the moment (Johnson 2019, 64). *Harriet*, then, is a space where the central character can proceed to live out her trauma without being captured and framed within ideas of, for example, the 'traumatised woman'. With this freshly in mind, the project then moves to engage with the first of two parts of the narrative, which are separated by plateau 4. The reason I have split the narrative up is to mix the styles of writing so that, if the project is read from start to finish, the reader is kept engaged throughout.

Plateau 4 focuses more closely on some of the points discussed in plateau 3 – principally the idea of traumatic sensation as singular – in order to put forward a concept I call the 'happening non-happening' which, briefly put, describes the affective force of moments that are difficult to put into words but nonetheless produce a sense of trauma. What I am interested in with this plateau overall is further dispelling the idea that trauma is limited to catastrophic, punctual moments that are fixed in the past, and that feel predictably the same for all bodies. This plateau is my attempt, at a very basic level, to provide a contribution to trauma theory that suggests that both the event of, and responses to, trauma are not easily characterisable. The final two sections of the project consist of part II of *Harriet* and, finally, a brief epilogue. In the epilogue I consider the limits of a therapeutic and popular culture that is focused on the seemingly self-evident goals of 'happiness' and 'healing', and I argue that the imperative to move 'forward' is synonymous with the impulse of neoliberal productivity, and is detrimental to the feeling through of trauma on one's own terms. To conclude, I put together some suggestions around the enabling and therapeutic power of alternative approaches.

1. Shaping Trauma Through Theory

This plateau is an attempt to trace the historical development of trauma studies, not exhaustively, but by drawing on particular arguments in order to animate the theoretical energies of the project. I'm going to structure the discussion using three central pockets of thought that lead to Cvetkovich as the scholar whose thinking most closely reflects my own. The first section of the discussion will focus on Freud whose central position in this plateau is not intended as a disregard of the importance of other historical work on trauma, but instead enables the set up of a specific trajectory which will link to the second section of discussion – the work of Cathy Caruth – for whom Freud is a considerable influence, and who is positioned as a departure point for Cvetkovich. The work of Caruth has been enormously influential in extending the relevance of Freud to the contemporary moment, and her emphasis on the dissociative and silencing effects of trauma provide a convincing if problematic account; it is in drawing out this tension that the discussion will arrive at the third substantive section, which focuses on Cvetkovich. Throughout the plateau, I draw insights from Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze in order to set in motion this project as one that thinks trauma outside of its traditional 'shape' of disassociation, fragmentation, and repression. The desire to dissolve, or at least reduce, the idea of trauma as a pathology is an approach that I feel is shared between Cvetkovich's work and my own. Along with her emphasis on the potentially productive capacity of trauma, this is my reasoning for foregrounding her work. Where I extend on Cvetkovich's thought, and I elaborate on this towards the end of the plateau, is by pushing her theme of trauma-as-everyday closer to Deleuze, particularly a Bergsonian Deleuze – which is to say that I draw on Deleuze's usage of Bergson's concepts of time and memory as a continuum rather than an atomised chronology. This is so that I can start to think trauma in the terms that I will use more frequently throughout the rest of the project which, briefly put, can be described as a theory of trauma without a definable shape – trauma as continuous movement, and singular in sensation.

When I came to this project it was initially through a process of closely reading Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings*. In this text, Cvetkovich develops an approach to trauma that pushes at the seemingly strict boundaries set in place by clinical literatures that appear to have the authority to say what the event of trauma is, and how it should feel and be responded to. To be clear here, when I say 'clinical literatures' I draw on the description given by Cvetkovich (2003, 17) which refers to the historical stream of research on trauma within both psychiatric and psychological fields, and which is guided by the theories of not only Sigmund Freud, but also Jean Martin Charcot and, slightly later, Pierre Janet, all of whose work can be argued to have directly informed the eventual development of post-traumatic stress disorder as a clinical diagnosis in the 1980s. All of this literature – and this is reflected also in the definition of PTSD – is concerned principally with defining trauma in relation to a process of remembering, and as

an overwhelming past event that is located in the unconscious, catalysing a fragmentation, or disassociation, within the psyche (Diedrich 2018, 84).

At the time of reading Cvetkovich's text I was almost completely unfamiliar with any other trauma studies work, but what I *did* know was that, as a survivor of sexual violence in my early teenage years, I had always felt cast out by the conventional framing of trauma, and so it was refreshing to come across Cvetkovich as her views corroborated with my hunches. Historically, trauma has been referred to as a physical, and generally acute, wound; a sudden puncturing or rupturing of a body (Kurtz 2018, 1). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the inclusion of the term 'trauma' to describe psychic distress has carried similar connotations in which trauma is captured as a shocking event that leads to a progression of particular responses that are identified as normal or appropriate. Cvetkovich's upheaval of this formula resonates with my own research interests – her conceptualising of trauma is as a social and cultural category in order to draw in to the research space the everyday stuff that is left out by the clinical literatures' tendency to hinge on trauma as necessarily dramatic. Cvetkovich (2003, 2) qualifies this in part through disclosure of her own experiences as a recipient of what she calls the "magic-bullet theory" of having been told that her history of incest was the likely root of her adult depression. It is certainly not the case that Cvetkovich is denying the link between sexual trauma and mental health here, but what she *is* saying is that trauma cannot be explained as a simple move from point A to point B. If Cvetkovich's history of sexual trauma is anything like my own, then it is something much harder to grasp, and it is not easily locatable at any one point in space-time.

Cvetkovich is of course not the only scholar to have responded to clinical approaches to trauma. Trauma studies emerged as a mode of literary and cultural analysis in the 1990s, distinct from the clinical literature, and headed by – to name a few – Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (see their 1992 text *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*), and Cathy Caruth, who I will discuss further in this plateau (Balaev 2014, 1). Drawing heavily on poststructuralism and deconstructionism, the aim of these theorists was to re-think psychoanalytic models of trauma by reading texts of literature, cinema, and art as structurally traumatised rather than attempting to describe the experience of trauma (Atkinson and Richardson 2013, 6). Like the clinical literature, trauma is viewed by these theorists as an event that fragments consciousness, however, this body of work goes further in order to demonstrate that the suddenness of trauma is such that it prevents direct linguistic representation (Balaev 2014, 2). The tension that is drawn out, then – and this is what gives trauma studies its poststructuralist flavour – is between trauma as a phenomena and the impossibility of truth, and the impossibility of bearing absolute witness to catastrophe (Atkinson and Richardson 2013, 6). Cvetkovich's response to this model is not so much to challenge the idea that trauma is nonrepresentational, but to question the centrality of pathological fragmentation, and the locating of trauma as a catastrophic past event, as potentially limiting. What she presents instead is an account of

the ‘everydayness’ of trauma – as something that is specific, localised, and productive of cultures and publics.

The Face of Freud in Trauma Studies

The moment in the late 19th century in which the focus of neurology and psychology on trauma was lingering on hysteria as an explicitly ‘female’ problem was forced to be reconfigured with the recognition of trauma observed in the soldiers involved in combat in the First World War (Ringel 2012, 1). Sigmund Freud had been one of the practitioners at the forefront of theorising hysteria as a traumatic response, positioning it as something that erupts after a period of latency, in which a past traumatic event has been repressed (Barnaby 2018, 24). This, independently corroborated by Freud’s contemporary, Pierre Janet, as ‘disassociation’ describes a process of traumatic remembering which is considered pathological to ‘normal’ states of consciousness (Cvetkovich 2003, 17; Ringel 2012, 4; van der Hart and Horst 1989, 398). The result of repression, or disassociation, for Freud, means that the process of remembering can never be accurate, that is, it is never a *true* recollection of an event that belongs to the past (Leys 2000, 271. All that can be achieved is a narrative or representation that manifests through the symptoms of hysteria (Barnaby 2018, 24-25). Hysterics, considered to be pre-disposed to suffer from these abnormal, or ‘false’, states of reminiscence as a result of the *enervated* nervous system presumed characteristic of their gender, were the starting point of what has come to be an enormously influential way of thinking about trauma, and which influences contemporary theories still (Allison and Roberts 1994, 248). The idea that trauma causes disassociation or a gap in the psyche stays prevalent throughout Freud’s thought, the adjustment being that it was eventually disregarded as a gender specific phenomenon, primarily because what came to be termed ‘shell shock’ syndrome in the soldiers of the First World War was remarked upon as the same neurosis, given that it described similar symptoms: screaming, crying, memory loss, and paralysis (Ringel 2012, 2).

It is Freud’s concept of the ‘the protective shield’ in his 1920 text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that I am especially interested in for the purpose of this section of the discussion, because it makes concrete what Freud had already been describing as a series of seeming defence mechanisms that characterise the repression of the traumatic event. The protective shield is Freud’s conceptualising of the trauma of combat stress and, through it, he evokes the imagery of an organism that “acquires [a] shield” such that it is, to a degree, resistant to stimuli (See Freud [1920] 2010, 35-54). This “efficacious barrier”, however, can be breached if the stimulus is strong enough to, quite literally, penetrate and shock it (Freud [1920] 2010, 48; Barnaby 2018, 21). The response to this shock, Freud writes, is to create a further defensive layer. In writing on the protective shield, Cvetkovich (2003, 53) notes at this point something that will become increasingly important throughout this project; what Freud is describing is trauma as necessarily and immediately painful, presenting a literal image of what it means to be

"hardened by experience", which thereby closes down what Cvetkovich argues in her work to be the potentially affirmative and transformative capacity of trauma. For Freud, this hardening of the protective shield involves the defence mechanisms laid out in his earlier work which consists of the paradox of hyperarousal and numbing, in which sensation for an organism is always unpleasant and must be minimised using the capacity of the cortical shield (Cvetkovich 2003, 54; Zepf and Zepf [2008] 2017, 338). This defence mechanism comprises primarily the neurosis of traumatic remembering which, as in the case of hysteria, describes an inability to remember the traumatic event proper, and is expressed through what Freud ([1920] 2010, 27) describes as a "compulsion to repeat" via the traumatised individual creating experiential representations (dreams, memories) in an attempt to gain some control, or master the sensation of the traumatic event (Leys 2000, 271).

What can be seen developing here is the 'shape' of trauma that I problematise within this project, that is, an imagining of trauma as an overwhelming event that catalyses predictable responses. Freud's work remains prominent – the universalising effect of the sensation paradox can still be seen in, for example, contemporary definitions of PTSD, in which hyperarousal and numbing remained two clinically accepted symptoms (Cvetkovich 2003, 55). Without denying the influence of Freud upon the development of trauma theory, I depart from him for two main reasons, which can be grouped under a general idea that Freudian theory lays the foundation for an isolating, and isolatable face of trauma. As I see it, the first problem – and this relates particularly to the concept of the protective shield – is that Freud is implicitly supportive of the traditional Cartesian model of thought and knowledge, which is one that I seek to unsettle in this project. Freud, in all of his work, seems to begin from the position that truth exists irrespective of whether or not we find it, but that we must endeavour to find it because – and this is where he sits most closely with Descartes' *cogito* – we have within us a natural "will to truth", that is, we *want* and *have the authority* to find the truth that is 'out there' (Lambert 2012, 10). Evidence of this can be seen in the myths that Freud appeals to in order to shape his theories, possibly the most influential of which has been the Oedipus complex, which I discuss shortly (Bowlby 2006, 115).

For now, however, I suggest that the concept of the protective shield is instrumental in representing what is thought to constitute the 'inside' and 'outside', which Freud seems to have already determined in advance. 'Outside' is a world, or The World, full of stimuli that exists fundamentally external to, and independent of, the 'inside' which, for Freud, refers to his structural model of the psyche (see Compton, A. [1981] 2017, and Freud [1923] 2018 on the Ego-Id-Superego model). Not only is this suggestive of the possibility of a Cartesian mind-body dualism, but it enables thinking of trauma as an external, catastrophic force unknown and unexpected to the receiving psyche. Given that the focus of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is battlefield survivors, it does of course hold some relevance to conceptualise trauma as catastrophic, irrespective of the problematic 'inside' and 'outside' distinction. My point here, however, is to draw awareness to how influential texts such as Freud's have shaped contemporary

understandings of trauma, and the implications of thinking it as a catastrophic, external force. It is useful to note the role this type of thinking has to play in the cultural constructions of – for example – the positioning of sexual violence as something that happens 'out there' in order to avoid admitting that it actually mostly takes place within the intimacies of everyday life. The premise of an 'inside' and 'outside', I feel, has come to be significant in the prevalence of rape myths. This is particularly the case when it comes to ideas of what is considered 'real' rape (attacks perpetuated by a stranger in a dark alley, for example) and how this then assists the familiar cultural trope of women as making false allegations (about their uncle, their father, or a friend) (Estrich 1987; Conaghan and Russell 2014, 28). To elaborate on this further is Laura Brown's (1995, 199) critique of the then phrasing of PTSD in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as an "event outside the range of usual human experience", which she identifies as ineffective in articulating not only the complexities of sexual trauma, but also the extent to which it is commonplace. Incest, she argues, is very much within the range of human experience, given that it is prolific and, for many individuals, is repetitive and continuous over a long period of time (Brown 1995, 101). Stating that the traumatic event must be "outside the range" as a prerequisite for traumatic distress, then, immediately disqualifies a significant number of sexual violence survivors.

Trauma conceived as "outside the range" or 'catastrophic' has been the guiding thread through much scholarship that has followed on from Freud, particularly in the so-called 'narrative turn', in which the representation of trauma in literary texts have focused on cataclysmic European and American events such as the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11 (Traverso and Broderick 2010, 4; Berger 1997, 571). What these works are marked by is an interest in Freud's theory of traumatic repetition, and they contribute to setting the tone for not only the idea that trauma belongs to the domain of catastrophe, but also that it can be located within a fixed frame of the past (Pederson 2018, 100). I have already mentioned Freud's privileging of fantasy in articulating his theories and, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it is Torquato Tasso's epic *Gerusalemme Liberata* that provides the interpretative space for Freud's very specific formula of trauma. In this story, the hero unwittingly kills his beloved while she is disguised in enemy armour and then, later in the tale, appears to slay her again – or has a memory of slaying her – when he strikes a tree with his sword but hears her voice and sees her blood (Freud [1920] 2010, 33). Freud presents this imagery – or what Caruth (1996, 6) calls "the parable of the wound and the voice" – as an account of the "compulsion to repeat". The specific formula of trauma that is being supported by the tale is one that traces a line very neatly from a distinct point in the past, through a period of latency, and to period of belated – but not accurate – re-experiencing of the traumatic event. What is also implicit in this formula is an attributing of a sort of autonomy to trauma; the traumatised individual, Freud ([1920] 2010, 24) writes, is "obliged" to repeat the repressed material as an event that "belongs" to the past in an effort to, in effect, take control of that which cannot be controlled. This seeming ontological certainty of trauma as a phenomena that conducts its own operations is taken up

later by Caruth in her analysis of Freud's traumatic repetition, and which sets the tone for belatedness as the theoretical springboard for her 1996 landmark text *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Continuing the interpretation of Tasso's story, Caruth (1996, 2) corroborates with Freud in positioning the traumatised individual as submissive, and "unwitting" in their re-enactment "of an event that one cannot simply leave behind".

Caruth's trajectory has been to popularise the idea of trauma as unrepresentable which can be thought of as a locking in of the past, such that it becomes inaccessible (Balaev 2014, 1). How Caruth goes about doing this is the focus of the following section, but it is worth noting here that, while Caruth stays close to Freud in composing trauma as a fixed architecture of the past, *unlike* Freud, her turn to literature is a way to approach the gaps left by traumatic experience, and to acknowledge the impact of that which, for Caruth, can only be expressed indirectly. This contrasts with the role that literature plays in Freud's work, which is one that also stands as markedly different to my own, and serves as my second most significant departure point from his thought. This project turns to literature as a method with which to cease the search for originary ideas and identities, presenting writing as a technique that can generate meaning through the act of expression. Contrastingly, Freud turns to literature in order to develop a mythically based hermeneutic system for understanding the human psyche (Marcel 2005, 113). The reliance on Greek mythology, for Freud, was not an arbitrary choice. Of the belief that literary texts provided insights for the development of psychoanalysis, what Greek mythology offered was a perceived stronger hook of realism than that of other fiction, in the sense that the myths were thought to take their cue from 'actual experience' (Bowlby 2007, 3). The idea that the myths reflected human culture bolstered a belief that they could harbour ancient meanings to be drawn upon. This, tracing back to the Cartesian model of thought and knowledge, stands as a method of going looking for and extracting truth that is thought to be 'out there', and Freud's interpretation of the story by Tasso is only one indicator of this tendency.

Freud's concentration on Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus the King*, in which Oedipus Rex unwittingly fulfils the prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother, is perhaps Freud's most famous literary interpretation, and led to the development of "the Oedipus complex", a concept introduced in his 1899 text *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Bowlby 2007, 2). What appears problematic is that the 'discovery' of Oedipus presents as a claim to the primacy of the unconscious – that myth, tragedy, and dream give vent to and express the repressed longings and fears of humankind (Deleuze and Guattari [1983] 2008, 54; Sels 2011, 57). It is, as Rachel Bowlby (2006, 113) writes, an attempt to find the "source of deep and seemingly immutable human psychological forces expressed in [an] ancient work". Generalising from what appeared to be a frequent question around incest in Greek culture (Marcel 2005, 114), Freud – if we listen to Deleuze and Guattari – goes looking for a "sovereign" concept that can group all of the complexities of infantile sexual development into one representation ("Well now, *that* looks like Oedipus") that can be turned to as a hermeneutic heuristic device (Marcel 2005, 114; Deleuze

and Guattari [1983] 2008 54 and 55). However, a more sympathetic reading of Freud is of his symbolisation and sublimation as a flexible storytelling in which "this means this" but might mean "also that", that is, mythology can be considered not as simple as mysteriously hiding the truth until the right individual can correctly interpret its symbols (Downing 1975, 9; Sels 2011, 61). Instead, it can be considered to only go halfway to suggesting a meaning, and that this vagueness is part of its functionality – what it offers is actually a tool for meaning-making (Downing 1975, 6; Sels 2011, 62). This Lacanian approach – that mythology does not refer to any external reality, but instead constructs it – is not however quite convincing enough because 'Oedipus' as a figure appears injected into what is thought to comprise the unconscious and is relied upon still, as I explore below, as a universal identity from which to understand human experience, which leaves little room for experimentation with meaning (Sels 2011, 63).

The Oedipus complex is not in itself a direct contribution to Freud's theory of dreams, but it plays a significant role in emphasising what Freud believed to be the infantile roots of the unconscious (Freud and Strachey [1955] 2010, xxiii). It is a model for libidinal development which, although not appearing to address trauma explicitly, is relevant for this discussion because, firstly, it presents some of the strongest evidence of Freud's thought as hinging on the possibility of an *a priori* truth and, secondly, the Oedipus complex is still employed in psychotherapeutic practices, or 'talk therapy', which is popularly turned to by trauma survivors, including myself. Freud's concern for what he believed to be an inevitable trajectory of psychosexual development, moving through five stages of increasing sexual awareness from birth up until around fifteen years of age, provided an influence for John Bowlby's work in the 1950s on what has come to be known as "attachment theory", which makes the connection between what is identified as 'secure' attachment in childhood, and the capacity of the individual to nurture strong relationships as an adult (Sable 2007, 22; Thompson 2000, 147). I will speak in more detail in the following plateau about my experiences with therapy following sexual abuse, however I want at this point to acknowledge the impact of the Oedipus complex on attachment theory – which is the theoretical model I was treated under – because it is, I feel, another iteration of a "sovereign" concept that collects the complexities of psychological development into a group of representations, turning towards what are called 'attachment styles' between individuals, and the considering the role that these styles play when it comes to contexts of trauma (Bowlby 1988, 9).

The reliance on Freudian psychoanalysis in attachment theory can be seen through the focus on childhood in conceptualising relationship attachments, particularly between mother-infant, yet it should be noted that attachment-based thought makes a couple of significant shifts from Freud. The first is a departure from Freud's ideas of infantile sexuality, namely the principles that young boys harbour sexual desire for their mothers and identify their father as rivals (Holmes 2001, 1). Bowlby's work is marked by a strong Darwinian influence, making him a firm believer in the importance of environmental influence and interaction rather than psychosexual development based on unconscious libidinal desires

(Bretherton 1992, 762; Bahn 2013, 10). The second shift is a reorientation from a conflictual to a harmonious model of mother-infant interaction, whereby any conflict that *does* arise is not rooted in sexual friction or repressed desires, but instead in attention deficiency (Holmes 1996, 43). Where Oedipus remains, then, is in the consecrated idea of familial relations as determinative of 'healthy' adult behaviour – Bowlby's significant focus was on the need of the infant for an unbroken (secure) early attachment to the mother (Holmes 1996, 41; Fonagy 2018, 7). My experience of attachment-based psychotherapy followed a similar precedent – in seeking to understand both the event(s) of and my responses to sexual abuse, my therapist emphasised the importance of starting from 'the beginning', that is, my relationship with my father and mother. Focusing on classifications and corresponding patterns of behaviour, rationalising my exposure to abuse centred on unpacking the avoidant attachment style of my father, and my own anxious-fearful attachment in trying to connect with him. My father was preferentially focused on over the attachment to my mother, as he was identified as the more significant link to attention-deficiency. The abuse, committed by a man much older than me, and after a significant period of 'grooming', was perceived to be the consequent re-enactment of these childhood anxieties – an attempt to seek out a paternal figure as a guarantor of emotional security.

What this did was provide an originary point for my account of sexual abuse in order to theorise all of my subsequent behaviours and connections. Like a compass, all narratives and discussions would flick back to North – to my father. Particularly prominent in sessions was the addressing of my seeming ambivalence to my experiences, which was identified as repression – a hardening of the protective shield – as a defence mechanism against the shock of the abuse. Again, my father was the central figure for explanation, and we focused on working through that relationship, identified as seemingly deficient in attention in childhood, as a kind of healing-by-proxy method against the trauma that wasn't possible for me to remember correctly. As a slight disclosure, I actually found a lot of it oddly comforting at the time – sometimes it's nice to lean on a categorical crutch just to temporarily quiet the rushing chaos – but what I felt was that the specificities of my experiences were being flattened out in order to affirm a knowledge that had already been thought through – a universal model of trauma. The sessions could never be thoroughly exploratory because we were always looking backwards to Oedipus – the father – and confirming identity as foundational and instrumental in the formation of my relationships. The stuff that I like to say 'sticks out at the edges', like the fact that I thought of my trauma as more of a slow creep – confusing, and not actually always unpleasant – was wedged back in to the model. Whenever I tried to intercept the discussions with suggestions of urges, affects, and feelings, there was no space afforded to them because they disrupted the clearly demarcated shape of trauma as always horrifying and overwhelming.

Attachment-based theory presents as a very condensed, Freudian-laced, coping mechanism for trauma, and my encounter with it certainly served as a motivational factor to develop this project and put forward a contribution to thinking trauma otherwise, in more creative ways. Like Cvetkovich, what I seek to do

is challenge the field of trauma studies to engage more fully with the stuff that sticks out at the edges so that it might be possible to think trauma without its pathologizing shape as something catastrophic and stuck in an inaccessible past. The following section begins by drawing heavily on Cathy Caruth as one of the scholars at the forefront of the movement in trauma studies in the 1990s which, similarly, sought to contribute to the existing body of trauma theory at the time. Caruth set a trend for a deconstructive, post-structural approach to the work of Freud and his contemporaries, staying close to the idea of trauma as an event that is experienced belatedly and inaccurately, but extending it to consider this as the result of trauma's capacity to escape representation through language. In order to position my work as spring-boarding from the ideas of Cvetkovich, it is necessary to first attend closely to the work of Caruth, because her enormously influential ideas serve as a critical point of departure.

The Caruthian Influence

In 1995 Cathy Caruth edited and produced a collection of essays titled *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Writing the critical introduction to the text, Caruth (1995, 3-13) presents her initial account of trauma as an experience so sudden and overwhelming that it is not possible for it to be assimilated in the first instance, and returns only to haunt the survivor later on (Balaev 2008, 151). Here, Caruth's approach stays close to Freud in the sense that it emphasises what is seen to be the dissociative nature of trauma, and presents the traumatic event as something that can only be understood inaccurately and belatedly. For Caruth, the onset of traumatic pathology (stresses and post-traumatic symptoms) is the result of the traumatised individual trying to reclaim or understand a traumatic event that was not actually experienced consciously at the moment of its occurrence (Arnold-de Simine 2018, 140). Although Caruth insists on the central importance of Freud's work in understanding trauma, her departure from him is what makes her argument, from a post-structural viewpoint, compelling. The dissociative nature of trauma, Caruth (1995, 1996) argues, comes down to the referential limits of language. Simply put, trauma is an event that fragments consciousness and escapes direct linguistic representation (Caruth 1996, 115). Where Freud relies on drawing on symbolic meaning in order to explain trauma and traumatic responses, Caruth describes trauma as an more of an absence that cannot be framed within representation. She notes that Freud's own discovery of this through the investigation of traumatic dreams came as perplexing for him because it stood in direct contradiction to the interpretative methods on which he relied (Caruth 1996, 59; Leys 2000, 273). Such repetitive phenomena, it seemed, could not be understood in terms of unconscious meaning or wishes, as Freud would have had it, but are instead a "literal return of the event" (Leys 2000, 273). Because traumatic events fragment consciousness and evade linguistic representation, their re-occurrence presents as completely non-symbolic; "nothing but the unmediated occurrence of violent events" (Caruth 1995, 59; Leys 2000, 272; Caruth 1995, 5). This is Caruth's novel approach – to suggest that the non-

representational nature of trauma is evidence of the inherent contradictions of language and the inability to access the 'truth' of the past.

Extending on this, Caruth takes a certain distance from Freud also with her alternative approach to employing literature as a method of analysis. It is her 1996 text, *Unclaimed Experience*, that turns to literature in a less interpretative and more exploratory way of approaching trauma as otherwise unspoken, positioning literature as a technique of witnessing trauma as something that cannot be known in truth. Through excavating a range of literary and film texts, Caruth explores the capacity of literature to make meaning through practices of telling and expression despite not having the ability to create accurate representations. This, at least at first, is a liberating and refreshing approach, and it is one that I considered a lot when thinking about how to create a performative and practice-based PhD project. Peggy Phelan is a scholar who draws on Caruth in order to articulate the capacity of performance art – particularly live performance and theatre – to generate new experience and thought precisely because each performance is different and not an authentic representation of the story that is being told (Phelan 1997, 2). She writes that "the desire to preserve and represent the performance event is a desire we should resist" because "the affective outline of what we've lost might bring us closer to the bodies we want still to touch than the restored illustrations can" (Phelan 1997, 3). What Phelan is gesturing towards here is the radical streak of Caruth's thinking, which is to say that while trauma opens a breach in understanding, paradoxically it also opens possibilities for survival and experience. To briefly return to Caruth's analysis in *Unclaimed Experience* of Freud's interpretation of Tasso, the wound that cries out is not only an account of the compulsion to repeat – it is a performance of the trauma; it "addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 1996, 5). Through literature, here, what Caruth is suggesting is that the "tear" that trauma creates can be mended through practices of performance – of re-writing – in order to find different ways of bearing witness to, and healing from, it (Phelan 1997, 95). Ultimately, it is acts of repetition, rather than the seeking of pre-existent symbolic meaning, that pushes forward the evolving experience of the traumatised body (Caruth 1996, 62).

What Caruth puts forward is a theory that appears to sit well in line with some of the thinking that I employ in this project, namely ideas around the un-representability of the chaos of lived experience. She appears to problematise the possibility of a truth that is accessible, and draws attention to the generative capacity of re-presencing events through performance such as literature. Bearing witness to trauma, for Caruth, is not about attempting accuracy; it is about attending to the differences when re-producing or telling trauma in ways that are no less real than the event of trauma itself (see Caruth 1996, 1-25). However, it is here that problems with the Caruthian model arise. By staying close to Freud's formula of the latency period of trauma, Caruth remains attached to precisely that which she appears to want to disrupt. Her assertion that the truth of the past is inaccessible is not the same as saying that there is no absolute or *a priori* truth at all (see especially Caruth 1996, 11-117 [note 8]). For Caruth (1996,

18), the truth of the traumatic event *exists*, but it is locked into the past (and, likewise, to say that is to determine also the possibility of a 'true' past). It exists, as Freud would have had it, in an 'outside' that is external to and independent from the psyche, which then reiterates the idea of trauma as a catastrophic, external force. As such, despite the fact that Caruth presents a convincing account of un-representability, which sits well with much post-structural thought, in drawing attention to the structural unknowability of trauma, Caruth actually ends up detracting from the specificities of experience (Cvetkovich 2003, 18). The Caruthian model, then, is another attempt at universality – it narrowly conceptualises both the event of trauma, and traumatic responses. Indeed, Caruth's turn to neurobiology – particularly the work of the psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk – confirms this, as Caruth seeks in van der Kolk's work an affirmation of her view of the innate causality between trauma and disassociation (Balaev 2014, 5). Van der Kolk's theory presents the literal character of phenomena such as traumatic nightmares as a neurobiological response in which 'ordinary' narrative recall is interrupted, eliciting a "speechless terror" as a universal and expected response (Leys 2000, 272; see also van der Kolk and van der Hart on *The Intrusive Past* in Caruth 1995, 158-182).

It does not necessarily have to be the case that re-thinking trauma must involve thinking it completely outside of the Caruthian model. What I draw attention to, and what Cvetkovich too spotlights in her own work, are the risks involved when attempting to resolve trauma exclusively within psychological or medical explanations. The stuff that I have already described as sticking out at the edges falls outside of the Caruthian model, in part because the model seeks to distinguish between the very ideas of 'inside' and 'outside' (Cvetkovich 2003, 18). What is necessary, and what I seek to contribute toward with this project, is a detachment from both the centrality of psychological fragmentation, latency, and recollection, and from the pathologisation of memory – the idea that there is such a thing as 'ordinary' (accurate?) memory from a 'healthy' psychological faculty which becomes defunct, or ineffective, in the wake of trauma. In turn, moving away from this relieves the focus on trauma as a catastrophic event. Of course, there *are* traumas that are catastrophic in the sense that they are acute – a crash, witnessing or being involved in a violent act – and these events may well trigger a disorganisation in felt and lived experience such that it could later be described as a "speechless terror" (Leys 2000, 272). But the trauma I target in this project is the slow creep of and long shadow cast by extended periods of sexual violence, which is not attended to effectively if we follow Caruth's thought. Attention to this type of trauma necessitates making space for the social, cultural, and affective factors that complicate the strict temporality and symptomatology characteristic of Caruth's work, the influence of which has come to be known as the 'traditional' model of trauma (Balaev 2018, 363).

Rejecting the search for a universal model of trauma is necessarily a rejection of the preferential tendency towards the Cartesian mind-body dualism that I discussed as present in Freud's and – by extension – Caruth's work. It is through adhering to this dualism that it becomes possible to conceive of an 'inside' (the mind, the cortical shield) to which trauma happens from the 'outside' and, following

on from this, it then becomes easier to establish what are seen to be normative characteristics that help to outline trauma response models such as PTSD. When it comes to attending to the complexity of trauma from sexual violence specifically, scholars such as Judith Herman made significant inroads in the 1990s to expand how symptoms of trauma are theorised, from a feminist perspective. In particular, Herman's 1992 text *Trauma and Recovery* argues the need for a more comprehensive diagnostic concept because PTSD, as it was defined at the time, hinged on the circumscription of past and overwhelming events such as combat or disaster, which not only silenced the chronic and persistent abuse experienced by many individuals but also normalised such abuse given that it was not considered, as Laura Brown (1995, 102) identified, "outside the range of usual human experience". "Complex post-traumatic stress disorder" is Herman's suggestion to more adequately account for these effects, and in the 2015 epilogue to *Trauma and Recovery* she updates to say that the recent instalment of the diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association now includes aspects of complex PTSD in a broadened definition that makes room for prolonged and repeated trauma (Herman 1992, 257; see also Herman 1992, 115-133 on "A New Diagnosis"). Herman's critique is significant because her arrival at a new diagnostic suggestion is borne out of a thorough historical account of how and where trauma becomes recognised, and the social and political implications this has (Cvetkovich 2003, 30). However, as adept as this approach is at pointing out how clinical modelling of trauma greyscales the inconsistencies and inequalities around how trauma is seen (she draws particularly on the link between the 1970s women's liberation movement and the recognition of the trauma experienced by women in civilian life), Herman herself – like Caruth – maintains an attachment to science and medicine (Cvetkovich 2003, 31). The search, for Herman, appears to be to expand the core symptoms recognisable as 'trauma' – in other words she multiplies traumatic symptoms by *n*, rather than problematising the concept in its entirety. Her efforts to unsettle the paradigm of trauma-as-catastrophic are commendable, for sure, yet the spectre of Freud lingers because what Herman still appeals to is an idea of an 'inside' psychic reality that is upset by trauma and expresses symptoms that are common to all traumatic experience (Cvetkovich 2003, 31).

It is difficult to move outside the influence of the traditional trauma model, it seems, yet the complexity of sexual trauma is such that it demands considerable re-thinking. Memory – conceived of as belated and fragmented when traumatised (an aberration from the 'accurate' integrity of recall that is assumed to be ordinarily possible) is the cornerstone of Freudian and Caruthian thought. The pathologizing belief that, unless interrupted by the shock of trauma, memory serves as a sort of storehouse in which life experiences are recorded exactly, can be problematised by conceptualising time using a different theoretical viewpoint, and applying it to the seeming 'everydayness' of sexual trauma. The traditional trauma model commits to the chronological atomism of time with which we are all familiar, that is, an instant is followed by an instant, is followed by another instant. In Henri Bergson's 1889 text *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* he observes the scientific tendency to

localise number in space, splitting up into units without limit what Bergson sees as an otherwise indivisible process (Bergson [1889] 2001, 84). This has authority over how we order common sense understanding of time, that is, we project time into space, setting instants next to each other as discrete units that are analogous with mathematical points (Ansell-Pearson 2018, 65). The form that results is a continuous, linear chain of time that is termed past, present, and future. This is a spatial interrupting for the sake of common clarity what Bergson terms "duration", which is a process that cannot be subjected to such mathematical treatment (See especially Bergson [1911] 1944, 1-27). Duration describes what Bergson writes in his 1911 text *Creative Evolution* as "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (Bergson [1911] 1944, 4; see also Ansell-Pearson 2018, 18-26 on duration). It is an indivisible process in which everything is chaotic rather than sequential. From the perspective of duration, then, time can be thought of as "without distinction" (Ansell-Pearson 2018, 21); it is not so much that there *isn't* a past, present, or future, but that they are not locatable within an ideal space in which they can be set out along a line that is experienced the same by all bodies. The impact that this has upon the role of memory is that it upheaves the conception that memory is a practice of recall, in which the past is reproduced in the present – memory in this manner is considered a diluted or weakened form of perception (Ansell-Pearson 2018, 74). Instead, for Bergson memory is active and operative – it creates something new in the act of remembering, and in doing so, it becomes possible to grant the past an ontological existence – "the past…has ceased to act…But it has not ceased to be" – rather than standing as a faded version of the present, an image which is frequently assigned so much authority (Deleuze [1966] 1988, 5). Memory, then, is a practice of creativity, which stands as antithetical to the ideas of Caruth and Freud. Caruth is cognisant to point out the limits of language – that language as a tool for articulating precise distinctions between things is often useful for social life, but is not actually representative of its chaos – but she remains committed to the common chronological model of time, and presents it as both representative of time itself and as explanatory for responses to trauma. In doing so, the past holds on to its status as a faded version of the present, and it attains an autonomy precisely because it remains in the present's shadow – it becomes inaccessible and keeps, like a secret, the memories from the traumatised body who suffers, as Caruth's (1996) argument broadly states, from irreversible damage to the psyche.

Although, for Caruth, the very practices of repetition in attempt to access the absent trauma is for her a generative process in that it compels the traumatised body to find new ways to bear witness to the trauma, the commitment of her project to a certain determinacy of the past closes down the possibility of investigating trauma in different ways by locating it as a fixed, catastrophic event. When I come to discuss Ann Cvetkovich's work in more detail in the next section what I will foreground is how she detaches from the search for an explanatory model of trauma that grounds it in magnitude, and thinks trauma instead in terms of the specificities of encounter in order to present it as affective and 'everyday'. Briefly put, moving away from the repressive impetus of the traditional trauma model creates a space

in which to set the tone for this project as always creating and moving – and that conversation owes a lot to the work of Cvetkovich. Creation, here, denotes change that is continuous, and that change is, in Bergsonian terms, a change in quality, not magnitude (Ansell-Pearson 2018, 58). To return to Bergson, the tendency to think in spatial terms involves a preference towards thinking also in terms of magnitude. This can be seen in the traditional trauma model with the adherence to ideas of catastrophe, and to what is considered to constitute a traumatic response (this is more traumatic, this is less traumatic). If we stay close to Bergson, however, particularly a Deleuzian reading of Bergson, what unfolds through duration is a sense of continuous change in which differences are not of escalation or de-escalation but, as Deleuze ([1966] 1988, 23) writes, "differences of degree, of position, of dimension, of proportion". It is change that alters the very nature of the experience in question (Ansell-Pearson 2018, 58). This is critical for theorising trauma because it relieves the pressure to think in terms of states and permits an appreciation of the lack of stasis within durational life – that bodies are nothing other than their becoming in time (Ansell-Pearson 2018, 56). Bergson writes that "the truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change" (Bergson [1911] 1944, 4). When thinking about memory, it is no longer necessary to consider 'is this a more or less accurate remembering?' because the past is not a state that has simply ceased to *be*, and memory is not an attempt to exhume and recompose it based on an association of what is thought to be past (Deleuze [1966] 1988, 55). Memory is instead a new act in itself, responding to the past not as a state that comes before the present, but as part of a continuum through which all presents keep passing (Deleuze [1966] 1988, 59).

One of Bergson's most significant challenges to scientific thought is his de-privileging of the brain as a storehouse of memory (See especially Bergson [1911] 2016, 1-14; Ansell-Pearson 2018, 76). I have discussed the privileging of the 'inside' of the psyche and the 'outside' of The World, or lived environments, by Freud and Caruth at several points throughout this plateau, and this is something that Bergson looks to upset by positing the material world as a series of closely linked images, all of which are centres of action, and in which the body is an aggregate (Ansell-Pearson 2018, 78). The brain, Bergson ([1911] 2016, 4) writes, is only an image among other images, and if we were to look inside the brain, we would not be able to see every detail of consciousness, simply because the brain does not hold it. When the brain is considered separate from experience, it becomes easier to see how trauma might be conceived of as something external that happens *to* rather than *with* the body, and extending on from that it becomes easier to view trauma from a medicalised viewpoint as an effect that triggers symptoms which need treating. Folded in with duration, however, memory is not *in* the brain, but is embedded in and with the flux of time as duration. The brain is the motor mechanism for memory, and conditions it, but memory is not *governed* by it. There is, as Deleuze ([1966] 1988, 54) writes, no "difference in kind between the other states of matter and the brain". Everything is movement, and so, as Deleuze ([1966] 1988, 54) writes again, "The question 'where are recollections preserved?' involves a false problem", simply because there is no preservation to be achieved.

When I was in therapy, the focus was not on movement, but on states – events fixed in the past – and on trying to crack into the jar of recollection in order to analyse those events. It made me feel pickled; stuck. This is the effect of having conceived memory as something contained with and ordered by the brain. The view of my memory was as something that was fractured or broken – interrupted from an otherwise normal functioning. But the truth, as I felt it, was that there were no irretrievable memories to consider. The conclusion I came to was that holding on to the idea of a lost or absent past was a convenient way of articulating my body as damaged and in need of treatment. My abuse, like much sexual abuse, wasn't an enormous, cataclysmic shock, and yet, there seemed to me to be an attempt to frame it as such in order to make it seem more important. In the opening pages of *An Archive of Feelings*, Cvetkovich (2003, 3) writes that often sexual trauma doesn't appear to measure up to the trauma of collectively experienced historical events such as war because it "doesn't appear sufficiently catastrophic". She notes that the overt publicising of catastrophic events appears in contrast to the seeming invisibilising of sexual trauma, and that her research exploring the connection between the two has necessitated considering the gender divide that appears to contribute to such invisibility (Cvetkovich 2003, 3). I don't think it is too sweeping a statement to say that the publicising of large-scale and catastrophic traumas likely always have a political agenda orientated around trying to make someone, somewhere, feel bad for the event. When I say 'someone' I don't mean necessarily a human individual but a structure that is perceived responsible, and that responsibility might vary depending on the viewpoint – for example the poor relief effort to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was attributed as a failure of the federal government, but, that very failure could also be interpreted as implicit blame placed *by* the government *onto* the residents of New Orleans for being working-class and without sufficient infrastructure in the first place – and that is without including the historical racial oppression that was already present (see Schneider 2005, Henkel *et al* 2006, and Belkhir and Charlemaine 2007). In the following plateau I attend to the feminising of sexual trauma within popular culture and also therapeutic approaches as a form of historical silencing that positions female bodies as, somehow, the instigators of their own abuse. It is difficult to make visible the acts and trauma of sexual violence in this way because it risks making male bodies, as a demographic of power, feel bad. However, throughout this project I am careful not to present an account of sexual violence as an overt expression of male dominance because that would mean grounding my argument in structural explanations which would directly contradict the theoretical theme in my work of continuous movement, and becoming. It is not enough to say that 'men' are the inflictors of sexual violence, because 'men' are not an autonomous category that operate 'out there'. Sexual violence is the result of complex historical and cultural forces that actualises through the expression of – not *only*, but frequently – male bodies. Trying to discuss sexual trauma outside of concrete and universalising terms involves the need to also recognise that the when, where, and how, of sexual violence cannot be reduced to a simple account of perpetrator/ victim. This is something I explore further in the *Happening Non-Happenings* plateau of this project. For now, though, it is time to turn to the final section of this plateau

in order to start animating my own approach to theorising sexual trauma as one that is – like Cvetkovich – resistant to the authority of both the traditional theoretical model of trauma studies and the medical discourses that act as its ally, and is instead sensitive to the specificities of trauma by foregrounding cultural dimensions rather than capturing it as an individualised problem.

Re-claiming Experience Through Cvetkovich

It is helpful to make clear from the beginning that Ann Cvetkovich's push against the traditional trauma model is not a flat out rejection of any relevance that such theories have identified. As I mentioned earlier, there are of course traumas that are acute and catastrophic and that, in part because of their suddenness, their effects *can* be unspeakable and unrepresentable, and the affected bodies *can* be marked by a scrambling of understanding, perception, and forgetting (Cvetkovich 2003, 7). What, as I understand it, is more of a problem for Cvetkovich is the pathologising impetus that seems to come with such claims – I refer here to the sense that is invoked of repression, fragmentation, and irreversible damage. In compiling what she calls "repositories of feelings and emotions", Cvetkovich (2003, 7 and 19) develops a focus on trauma that is collective, looking for how trauma refracts outwards to produce affective responses that are evidence of its vagaries and specificities, and so consequently cannot be contained within individualised and clinicalised symptoms. Her compilation involves an archive of cultural texts from different lesbian projects such as AIDS activism and lesbian performance art, in order to consider how they give rise to different ways of thinking trauma. A key departure from Caruth's thought to be noted here is how Cvetkovich's archive of lesbian trauma is productive of collective memory, which not only de-individualises traditional readings and understandings of trauma – it also upsets the assumption of trauma's dissociative effect on consciousness and memory. These oral histories are sites through which to investigate what Cvetkovich (2003, 9) calls "trauma cultures", which are not limited to the representation of trauma through narrative expression, but are principally concerned with the enabling of new publics and practices – in short, they put memory to work by animating and mobilising queer subjectivities and communities.

It is the productive and generative emphasis of Cvetkovich's work that resonates most closely with my own approach to trauma. Specifically, what it is about this emphasis that resonates with me is Cvetkovich's (2003, 7) effort to spotlight, through trauma, "the many forms of love, rage, intimacy, grief, shame…that are part of the vibrancy of queer cultures", which brings to the fore a radical thinking that resists pathologising judgements around how you should or shouldn't respond to trauma. In her account of *Bastard out of Carolina*, a semi-autobiographical novel by the enormously influential contemporary lesbian writer, Dorothy Allison, Cvetkovich (2003, 102) picks up on the attuning of Allison to the complex connections between trauma and pleasure when describing the masturbation of Bone, the twelve year old protagonist for whom pleasure is in part fuelled by the physical and sexual

abuse pressed upon her by her step-father. The expression of Bone's trauma through masturbation, Cvetkovich (2003, 103) writes, does not conform to the conventional demand that victims must be de-sexualised and passive in order to receive sympathy. Such a demand is what keeps Bone silent since her sexual fantasies are inextricable from the narrative of the abuse. In my own experiences, this is a demand that was also placed upon me when I wanted, in therapy, to explore the sexual sensations, thoughts, and responses that I had during and after my period of abuse. My requests were silenced through the framing of my experiences in derogatory terms – as 'unfortunate consequences' of abuse – in order to erase from the discussion anything that might complicate the visibly prescribed road to 'healing', which is something I discuss in the next plateau as part of the cultural capturing of the traumatised individual within what are seen to be essential feminine qualities, such as vulnerability, and passivity. Cvetkovich (2003, 103), then, uses *Bastard out of Carolina* as an example to suggest that such fantasies and sensations are not simply "perverse" products of sexual violence, but can be generative of pleasure and power in themselves, and this is part of her sharp attention to the nuances of feeling in order to problematise crude distinctions between 'good' and 'bad'. One of the central premises of *Archive* is to outline a sex-positive approach to sexual trauma in order to create space for discussion around sexual practices such as s/m, rather than capturing them as consequences of violence (Cvetkovich 2003, 34). This approach is not, however, the same as trying to construe sexual trauma as a positive experience. To return to Cvetkovich's analysis of Allison's novel, Bone's masturbation is about finding solace in somatic repetition to quell the fear that she feels equally in what Bone describes as dreams "full of long fingers, hands that reached around doorframes and crept over the edge of the mattress" (Allison [1992] 2012, 70). In Cvetkovich's 2012 (3) text *Depression: A Public Feeling*, she discusses further her goal of de-pathologising what are seen to be negative feelings in part because feeling bad can be a resource for action, rather than being glossed over. Here, Bone feels both bad with her fear and good with her self-pleasure. Both sets of feelings, I argue, must be thoroughly considered outside of normative iterations in order to appreciate the nuance or – as I will call it in a later plateau – the 'uneven surface' of traumatic experience.

Edging away from categorising responses to trauma goes hand-in-hand with disentangling trauma from a sense of the catastrophic, which is a focused effort of *Archive*. 'Trauma' as a term is deeply loaded with medical and psychoanalytic meaning which assists in construing it as something that is out of the ordinary, and in the process of doing so erases a lot of the bits in between. When Cvetkovich (2003, 3) writes that sexual trauma often doesn't appear "sufficiently catastrophic" she makes clear that this is because sexual violence often takes place within the domestic sphere, which frequently erases or reduces its perceived importance. The sense of familiarity is part of what fuels victim-blaming rhetoric – you get pegged as really having wanted sex with your rapist after all if you knew them, despite the statistics showing that 90% of complainants are abused by someone close to them (ONS 2013). What Cvetkovich (2003, 3) also says, is that sexual trauma often doesn't appear to be catastrophic because it

"doesn't produce dead bodies or even, necessarily, damaged ones". This is a critical point to pick up on. Cvetkovich's (2003, 29) approach to trauma is one that she describes as "everyday", which is to draw attention to the distinction between world historical events such as the Holocaust which have served as such a key reference point for much of trauma studies, and the idea that a different – or more flexible – theory of trauma is needed if such historical events are to be de-centralised in order to effectively respond to trauma, as Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson (2013, 2) describe as something that is "not rare, but common". What Cvetkovich is trying to do, as I see it, is not bring the trauma of mass-scale, catastrophic events 'down' to sexual trauma, or elevate or synonymise sexual trauma *with* mass events, but to get rid of the idea of magnitude almost completely in order to think instead in terms of the specificities of encounter, both in terms of the event of trauma and responses to it. What she foregrounds is the importance of casting a wide, roving field in order to take note of how trauma crops up in surprising ways and manifests in the textures of everyday life that might not appear (at first, at least) 'traumatic' (Cvetkovich 2003, 6 and 281).

Cvetkovich's dissolution of trauma-as-catastrophe lays much of the groundwork for my approach because, by articulating the 'everydayness' of trauma, she is already mobilising ideas of trauma as moving through different social and cultural fabrics. Sexual violence certainly does not always feature the hallmarks of 'violence' traditionally defined – physical injury, fear of death, use of weaponry – but that does not mean that its effects are not traumatic, and what feels traumatic doesn't have to fold in with already recognised symptoms (Wasco 2003, 312). Sexual trauma can be jarring, and although my experience has been primarily marked by a sort of numbness that might be described as ambivalence, I have in the past been sensitive to acute reminders – the most recent example I can think of was when watching the rape scene in the third episode of T*his Is England '86*, which was far too familiar and had me wanting to rip my entire skin off. But sexual trauma can also, as I have felt more often, generate quite an ordinary, but still unpleasant, sense of 'meh' or exhaustion. The slow creep of feeling just a bit crappy probably doesn't warrant – through the lens of the traditional trauma model – much attention. But highlighting these ordinary effects is not about arguing for greater inclusivity of symptoms ('here, *this* counts as trauma *too*!') within 'trauma' as a category, but is instead about thinking trauma as something that moves through and connects between bodies in different ways, so that we can resist earmarking what are considered legitimate forms of suffering, and how to suffer in the 'right' ways (Cvetkovich 2003, 5).

There is a danger here of creating the impression that what is being said is 'urgh, *everything* is traumatic' which would threaten to greyscale everything into a wider generalisation of trauma, and which would also fold conveniently into the currently fashionable wash of critiques describing the rise of a "victimhood culture" in which "censorious" and "over-sensitive" individuals (particularly students) are triggered by seemingly everything (see Lukianoff and Haidt 2015, and Halberstam 2014 for opinion on "the coddling of the American mind"). This "moral panic about moral panics", as Sara Ahmed (2015)

has described it, argues that the enhanced critique and consideration for the nuances of situations closes down opportunities for discussion and progression, when it actually does precisely the opposite by problematising norms around what is seen as ok to feel bad about. One of my principle arguments in this project is that trauma is not felt or experienced the-same-as by all bodies, and so it is ineffective to stick with a prescribed set of traumatic events or responses that are considered to be legitimate. A sharp example of how important it is to pay attention to the specificities of trauma can be found in the work of Claudia Rankine, particularly her 2014 text *Citizen: An American Lyric*, in which her focus on writing the affects that coagulate around traumatic incidents that appear as 'ordinary' moments demonstrate the intricate depth of historical racial violence. In an interview, Rankine (2014a) explains that, when writing *Citizen*, she "wasn't interested in scandal or outrageous moments"; instead, what she (re)narrates in the second person are anecdotes from friends and people she has met who recall shifts in tone, or gesture, in response to the placing of their black bodies in white dominated contexts – for example, a close friend who doesn't acknowledge her slippage when, repeatedly, calling you by her black housekeeper's name, or a trauma-specialist therapist who yells at you to get off her lawn before realising you've arrived for an appointment (Rankine 2014b, 7 and 18). Rankine (2014b, 55) writes that "you take in things you don't want all the time", which describes the presence of a trauma that creeps like shadows amongst everyday interactions, bringing with it unsolicited affects that stick in your throat, leaving you struggling to navigate and negotiate flashes of violence before the terrain is flattened out by the usual points of reference that mark it as either something that is legitimate to be concerned about, or not.

Enhancing the relevance of marginal, unexpected, and ordinary sites to the catalysing of trauma is critical to understanding trauma outside of clinical definitions that isolate it within the individual, in order to consider it instead as something that links more punctual points with pervasive presences, and as something that marks bodies differently – both the bodies that are traumatised, and the bodies that are in the vicinity of the trauma. In this project I describe trauma as singular. By this I mean that the sensation and experience of trauma cannot be identified by looking to a fixed form and idea of 'trauma' for reference. It is possible, I argue, to feel the sensation of trauma without it bearing resemblance to 'trauma' commonly understood. This claim is slippery, but it does not have to be elliptical. It is ideas around what is recognised as traumatic that I problematise here, because such recognitions either leave certain responses out or mark them as non-traumatic (such as my sense of general lethargy) or they are pathologised (such as the sexual sensations and thoughts that I experienced about my abuse). This project is about foregrounding trauma as having a 'thisness', in that traumatic sensation is different only to itself – as something that can be felt but not necessarily recognised in relation to something that has been felt before.

Following on from this, it is possible to see in a Bergsonian sense how this might mobilise a theory of trauma as not easily locatable in space-time. Trauma-as-singular cannot be thought of in terms of states because singular is necessarily non-referential, and so it can be thought instead in terms of continuity,

and duration. What I look to invoke is a sense of trauma as an enabler of becoming, of moving – in a sense – forward. This does, however, come with a caveat: moving forward is not synonymous with conventional ideas of 'happiness' and 'healing' because, as I discuss throughout this project, those terms have been loaded with prescriptions as to which way is 'forward', and that to fall short of those prescriptions is to be seen to heal incorrectly, or to not be able reach happiness. In a similar way, Cvetkovich's sex-positive focus comes without idyllic or utopian aims – her motive is to use cultural archives of trauma in order to build up queer communities that put to use the effects of trauma without trying to sanitise narratives with ideas of liberation that imagine a queer future free of secrecy or self-loathing. For example, Cvetkovich (2003, 90) critiques the approach to lesbianism taken by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis in their 1988 text *The Courage to Heal* within which they tackle the "spectre of causality" between childhood sexual abuse and lesbianism by stating that to say abuse causes homosexuality is to say there's something wrong with being gay. This statement paradoxically turns back on itself particularly because the text's otherwise sparse discussion on lesbianism suggests it *is* a problem, and Cvetkovich (2003, 90) wants to know why saying that abuse causes homosexuality can't just "as easily be based on the assumption that there's something right…with being lesbian or gay [?]"

There is a strong influence of Eve Sedgwick's work to be seen here around the re-claiming of shame, which is a tone that I also set in this project in order to work through the shame that I have experienced of having felt feelings that were identified as inappropriate or pathological. I speak throughout the following plateaus about enacting the affective force of shame through writing, drawing on the relational capacity of shame to affect bodies rather than using it to determine my position within the writing. Put differently, when writing this project I could have interpreted my shame as something that fixes me as a shamed, traumatised body. In this way, however, shame would remain imbibed with normative ideas and meanings of what is thought to be shameful or traumatising, and this in turn could keep the writing caught up in those ideas and stop the project from moving 'forward'. Instead, in view of mobilising a theory of trauma as movement, what I have done is put shame to work by considering it as an affect that moves between bodies that are continuously changing. This is less about either embracing or denying that I feel shame, and more about enacting it as a force that *does* something rather than *mean* something, which highlights the emphasis of this project on production over repression. Viewing shame as affective in this way is about recognising life as a swirling continuum that is difficult to capture within determined figures (Atkinson and Richardson 2013, 10). Put forward through writing, it is about animating something that has a continuously transformative capacity and, in this project, this is expressed most clearly in the narrative of *Harriet*, whereby shame is productive of Harriet as a character who resists being determined in the molar terms that would capture her as a typically traumatised female as the result of her childhood incest. Instead, the way that I enact shame through writing propels Harriet as a becoming that is not easily anticipatable based on her past experiences.

The strongly Deleuzian sense that is coming forward in the latter section of this plateau can be thought of as not so much a departure from Cvetkovich as an extension of her thought. It also requires a little explaining particularly in relation to *Harriet* because much Deleuzian discussion on affect hinges on a philosophy that dissolves the centrality of the subject, which might at first seem at odds with a project that focuses on a topic that is deeply personal, and painful. For Deleuze, an individual does not remain as one 'self' that can be identified – it is instead an actualisation of singularities that operate together in order to attain a certain, but temporary, consistency (Smith 1997, xxix). Deleuze (1997, 5) writes that "A life contains only virtuals. It is made of virtualities, events, singularities. What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality, but something that enters into a process of actualisation…" To be clear, the virtual is the condition of the actual – the actual being a material expression, but inseparable from its relation to the potential of the virtual to encounter certain conditions and emerge in different ways (Deleuze [1969] 2004). The self, then, cannot be defined by any pre-given identity but is instead defined by its capacity for becoming – it is pulled any which way by the forces of the virtual (Smith 1997, xxix). In a later plateau I approach the virtual more explicitly through a concept I call 'happening non-happenings' in order to discuss how the singularity of trauma actualises or 'surfaces' unevenly as something that becomes describable as traumatic. Here, Deleuze's philosophy of the impersonal is about the capacity of an individual to actualise in unforeseen ways, which is in turn a capacity to the resist molar determinations of identity. The determinations that I am concerned with in this project are what I describe in the next plateau as the 'shape' of 'trauma' and the 'traumatised woman'. In the narrative of *Harriet*, what is de-prioritised is the centrality of the subject so that Harriet is able to shift quickly, responding to events and instances in ways that might not be expected. What unfolds is a decomposition of the 'self' of Harriet so that she can be experimented with. But this is not an attempt to disregard the personal nature of her experience, or the personal nature of the topic of the whole project. My reaction is to the determination of 'trauma' and 'woman' as states, and Harriet's transformation and dissolution is intended as an expression of her capacity to change without ceasing. She can still be termed 'woman' or 'traumatised', but she retains the authority and autonomy to set the terms. We can refer back to the earlier discussion on Bergson in order to make better sense of this. Continuous movement, for Bergson, necessitates thinking outside of spatial terms in order to think change in quality, not magnitude. In the context of Harriet, Deleuze's philosophy of the impersonal is not the same as saying that Harriet is not a woman, or not traumatised, because we are not thinking her in terms of more or less a woman, or more or less traumatised, but instead 'woman' and 'trauma' in difference of degree. Woman as singular, trauma as singular, and sensation as singular. This is how, in Deleuzian terms, difference is thought – as something that lies outside of representation and *not* "in relation to a conceived identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition or a perceived similitude" (Deleuze [1968] 2014, 182). It is possible, then, for Harriet to become something new in each moment, and what she becomes is larger than the traditional model of trauma might otherwise permit.

In short, a philosophy of the impersonal is a way to tentatively sidestep the shaping of trauma as it has been engendered through popular culture and therapeutic approaches, and *Harriet* is a way through which to express where such sidestepping might lead. In the following plateau I will extend this conversation to include my own experiences of being shaped as a traumatised woman, and I will begin the conversation that will set the tone for the rest of the project, which is using writing as a method to re-consider the shape of trauma.

2. Writing a Body of Trauma

This project is an attempt to go some way to re-think shapes. The shape that I am interested in is 'trauma' as a result of sexual violence, which has been developed in such a way that it signals, quite precisely, both the event of trauma, and how trauma *should* be felt and responded to by the traumatised. Shape is the word I prefer to use over form because it is a more tactile term. It refers to the events, practices, gestures, and responses that condense to form 'trauma' as, well, a *shape* – a shape that appears to be understood well enough that you might reach out and touch it. When it comes to the event of trauma, Lauren Berlant (2011, 80) has written how it has been shaped by cultural theorists as something that is self-evident, autopoietic; a 'we know it when we know it' sort of thing. Instead of thinking trauma as a style of responding to happenings that are contingent on affective relations, trauma is contained within ideas of what comes to count as the event, which often must be catastrophic in order to be considered significant (Brown 1995, 102). In a later plateau I challenge the idea that trauma can be thought of as ontologically stable and easily identifiable by conceptualising the 'happening non-happening' which, broadly described, appeals to the long range of seemingly non-traumatic stuff – interruptions, a sleight of hand – which nevertheless can produce traumatic responses (or, how seemingly traumatic stuff may *not* always induce traumatic responses [Berlant 2011, 81]).

In this plateau, I focus firstly on how gendered violence is read in such a way that it effects the anticipation of particular traumatic responses, and that the anticipation of those responses hinge on essentialist ideas of what constitutes 'woman' – or more specifically – the 'traumatised woman'. I point toward a moment in the 1970s when the speaking out of women about their sexual abuse began to gain traction, but how these stories were co-opted and filtered through existing cultural understandings of both gender and sexual violence, figuring women as vulnerable and responsible for their abuse (Palmer-Mehta 2018, 160; Alcoff and Gray 1993, 260). Tracing a line back to antiquity, I locate the framing of sexual violence as transposable onto women through the figurations of females in Greek mythology, whereby acts of violence against women are naturalised as techniques with which to control their perceived 'untamed' and unstable nature. This, I argue, is a shadow that lingers into the 19th century with the re-construction of hysteria from a disorder resulting from what Hippocrates believed to be a literally wandering uterus, to Charcot's diagnosis of hysteria as a condition inherent in women due to their 'weakened nervous systems'. Here, again, women are posited as aberrant from the ideal of men.

I then turn to my own experience as a survivor of sexual abuse to explore how similar figurations inform strategies of 'healing' in the therapist's room. The road to healing – or 'happiness' – I claim, is predicated on essentialist tendencies present in therapeutic practices which not only assists in isolating gendered violence as an issue, but also diagnoses the seeming appropriateness of certain traumatic responses, while simultaneously alienating others (Cosgrove 2002, 89; Yeo 1997, 45; Cvetkovich 2003,

55). By orientating traumatic responses under 'trauma' as a rubric, the traumatised individual is figured as feminised and, consequently, sexism as an historical form of injustice is allowed to slip into the background (Ahmed 2008, 12).

You will read scattered throughout the plateau short vignettes, or 'images', which are navigations of moments in my life that indicate trauma-as-chaos. Trauma describes a condition of being overwhelmed; it is an activity of being reflexive about moments as they are lived (Berlant 2011, 81). But it is not possible to say that trauma *is*, and so it is not possible to say how it *should* feel. The moments I have written are capacious and swirling; they bring into sharp relief the materiality of relations to show how affective attachments are frothy and slippery (Donovan and Moss 2017, 12). In the final substantive section of the plateau, I reflect on this to consider how attempts to say what trauma *is* indicate a particular mapping of trauma that prescribe how to navigate it. Pushing against this, I contribute to geographical arguments for a 'spatial turn' in studies of trauma in order to theorise trauma in a way that is more sensitive to its specific manifestations (Walker 2010). I turn to a discussion of how shame can be thought of as an affective spatial expression of trauma, and is consequently productive of the writing-space of this project, enabling a way of thinking trauma differently.

What I also point towards is how shame holds a prickly proximity to other bodies through writing. It is uncomfortable particularly if it provokes ways of thinking trauma otherwise. Proximity can cause friction if you don't want to be close to the words; it's not necessarily easy to slide over each other in smooth understanding. But, I argue, it is this friction that generates, like heat, new possibilities for thought. From the heat of this plateau emerges a figure – the woman-monster. The woman-monster is named as such not because she takes a recognisable bestial form. This is a project that seeks to suspend form. The woman-monster is monstrous because she is unpredictable and shifting. She presents as a line-of-flight, shifting and changing – a critical inroad toward unravelling the shape of trauma – and woven through the narrative of *Harriet*, which will begin to unfold as we move on to the next plateau.

Image One

When I was fifteen, I was very difficult. Most teenagers are difficult. I lived in a sea of other teenagers, so I knew this. We wound our difficulties around us like little mesh scarves so that others couldn't get through because they couldn't possibly understand how difficult our difficulties were. It was a very profound activity. My own scarf I kept winding round and around my face until the mesh was so thick that it was very difficult to see or hear through it. No one could get in and I couldn't get out. My mother had cancer, I think.

My group of friends were extremely supportive. They were all boys. I had sex with each of them and we always said that we wouldn't tell the others because it was between us and it wasn't any of their

business, quite frankly. They were the only ones who were allowed to see through the thick mesh of my scarf. This kept me safe.

It was a very small world. It didn't really go any further than the confines of the village that we all grew up in and loved and hated in equal measures. Apart from one of the boys who lived about three miles up the road, and that was a very long way so he was an alien, really. The warmth of the sun is what I remember. I am sure that the summers were hotter back then. We were wanderers; rangers of the village. We walked every pavement each day and explored the surrounding jungles where we would build forts with logs and upside down Tesco trolleys.

One of my friends I was very close to. We always said that we had a connection that we didn't have with the others. I felt very safe with him, I think. He told me a lot about what he thought was right and wrong, and about the ways that he thought people should be. I listened to him for most of it. His mother really liked me; she was always drinking wine and called me darling.

One night, there was a huge argument with his dad. It took place in the house but then it also took place in the nearby woods. The same woods where we built forts with logs and upside down Tesco trolleys. I remember my friend running off, and his dad was searching for him but then returned to the house. I remember laughing when he punched the mirror.

Sometimes when I think back, I struggle to remember my mother. No, it's not that I don't remember, it's just that I get annoyed because there is only one version of her that I *can* remember. She slipped away before I had the chance to catch up to an age where we could have thought of each other as friends. I know that she really liked Fawlty Towers and that her favourite colour combination was yellow and purple which I always thought was a bit garish. But I didn't really know her. I didn't know her secrets or gossip. I was very difficult towards the end. I wound my mesh scarf tighter so that I couldn't see that she was dying.

We were sitting under the street lights at the local One-Stop one evening. I didn't notice the man when he approached. We didn't tend to notice people.

The Shape of Trauma

In the 1970s, a political strategy of 'speaking out' about gendered violence erupted from the women's liberation movement as part of an effort to develop a collective consciousness that would tell of male power and women's oppression (Cvetkovich 2003, 34; Harrington 2018, 2; Yeo 1997, 43). This movement in particular reworked traditional understandings of incest, which, although had historically been considered 'wrong', had up until that point been framed as a 'sin against society' rather than as a violation of an individual, resulting in the sidestepping of consent as an issue (Yeo 1997, 44; Armstrong 1994). Now, however, a radical voice was developing, one which told a story of women as property,

and of rape as power over that property (Hanisch 2010). Stories proliferated throughout the following decades, and the success by feminists in intervening in the cultural and media landscape was significant, with the stories becoming ubiquitous in popular culture, along with a sharp spike in interest within social science and psychological literature (Serisier 2018b, 53; Wieskamp 2019, 134). However, though radical in origin, these stories were frequently read through cultural and social cues which hinged on ideas that essentialised femininity (Serisier 2018b, 54). Carol Harrington (2018, 3) notes, for example, that talk shows in the 1990s typically featured the tearful, emotional face of the individual who would speak her story of abuse before turning to an expert mediator – one who was considered to speak with authority on the topic of violence. Here, the psychological expert would read the individual as vulnerable, yet responsible for her own trauma, drawing on cues that identified her as a Lolita-nymphet (Yeo 1997, 46). This was a speaking arrangement that scrutinised the conduct of the individual, positioning her as helpless, and in need of expert guidance in order to 'heal' and be made 'more resilient' (Naples 2003, 1154).

These tendencies have been picked up on in the oft-cited 1993 (284) article by Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray – *Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?* – who state the need to interrogate the incitement to speak out, and to be critical of whether or not the development of what has come to be called the 'survivor discourse' actually challenges relations of power. Put bluntly, 'speaking out' has not necessarily resulted in being able to speak experience on one's own terms (Palmer-Mehta 2018, 160). The paradox here is that what started out as an imperative toward empowerment has been swiftly recapitulated back into the oppressive circumstances it was seeking to disrupt. It continues today with heteronormative views remaining endemic in popular thought, and this is evidenced by the contemporary moment of our so-called 'rape culture' in which stories of violence are still slotted into existing representations of gender (Bates 2014; Gavey 2014). Rhetoric of victim-blaming and slut-shaming are instructive in fashioning a discursive scaffolding which articulates sexual abuse as victim-precipitated – with women being read as willing and compliant, enacting a 'yes' through their behaviour even if they say 'no' – while simultaneously the perpetrator is exonerated as 'over-sexed' or 'out of control' (Sills et al 2016, 936; Bohner et al 2013, 20; Ahmed 2014, 55).

The shaping of the traumatised woman in this way can be traced, broadly, back to antiquity, in which Greek mythology contains a proliferation of stories occupied with women or, more specifically, the *parthenos* – the virgin whose journey to a married state simultaneously symbolises the survival of the community and its potential downfall, owing to her capacity to revert to her unsocialised origins (Reeder 1995, 14). Graphic imagery of the 'untamed woman' appears in the myths as a series of divine and non-human creatures over which males must dominate in order to re-establish the social order (Reeder 1995, 405; Pomeroy 1995, 8). Some of these figures, such as the sorceresses Circe and Medea in Homer's *Odyssey*, along with the Sirens – winged beasts who lure men to their death with their song (Schmidt 1995, 57; Schein 1995, 19) – appear always in their bestial state. Others, however, are transformed from

parthenos to dangerous, sexualised female as a result of violence perpetuated against them – abduction, rape, or incestuous rape. The tales are positioned as vicissitudes of female development whereby the young woman is held accountable for having been pursued, while the males are relieved of responsibility for having succumbed to the female's allure (Seelig 2002, 903). Most famously amongst the tales is Medusa, whose rape by her father (thought to have been Zeus) in the virgin-temple of Athena results in her transmutation into a Gorgon, with snakes for hair and a gaze that turns males to stone (Seelig 2002, 898). Likewise, Cassandra's refusal of Apollo's advances – despite his gifting of clairvoyance to her – results in a curse whereby her prophecies are never believed (Brault 2009, 198). The "Cassandra curse", as it has come to be known in legal scholarship, is used today to describe the questioning of the credibility of victims of sexual violence who speak out against their perpetrators (Yarborough 1999, 627). Lastly, the maiden Kore (synonymous with *parthenos* – virgin, maiden) becomes Persephone after having been carried off to the underworld by Hades (Lincoln 1979, 223. The tale is seen by some as an allegory of the seasons – Persephone must spend seven months of the year with Hades, and the winter ends when she re-surfaces – but it is also an account of initiation to marriage, and a transposition of blame onto Persephone (Lincoln 1979, 224). Hades' command for Persephone's annual return results from her consumption of pomegranate seeds during her initial period in the underworld – a transgression prior to which she had been considered blameless, and innocent (Seeling 2002, 901).

Greek mythology is thought to have been expressive of the concerns and anxieties of Classical Athens as an extraordinarily and aggressively competitive society (Reeder 1995, 15). However, whether or not the stories are reflective of the role and perception of Athenian women is ambiguous. Carey (1995, 409) and Stewart (1995, 76) write that, while adultery, seduction, and rape were treated as serious property offences against the woman's male guardian, the distinction between the three terms is extremely unclear, and consent remained an under-reported issue. Although it is easy from this to revile the Athenians as misogynistic and seemingly obsessed with a culture of violence, following Rabinowitz (2011, 6), it is not so easy – or necessarily helpful – to assimilate their apparent construction of consent, desire, and force, with our own. What is perhaps significant here is not so much whether Athenian life was performed according to their myths, but the extent to which the myths have been drawn upon in historical and recent historical moments in articulating women as perfidious and unstable.

I discussed in the previous plateau Freud's commitment to Greek mythology in order to configure the Oedipal triangle, and how this has mobilised a universal pattern and perception of human experience, which has then been reflected in therapeutic practices and approaches (Seelig 2002, 901; Bowlby 2007, 14). However, more specific to the articulation of the figure of the 'untamed woman' is the construction of hysteria, a disorder that can be traced back to Classical Athens, and the taxonomy and etiology of which was seen – according to Hippocrates and Hippocratic physicians – to be the result of a literally moving uterus, whose wandering around the body precipitated distressing somatic responses such as

seizures and paralysis (Allison and Roberts 1994, 242). The idea of the 'wandering uterus' presents a certain medicalising of the untameable woman – a scientific account that makes plausible the thoughts put forward in the Greek myths (Allison and Roberts 1994, 243). Additionally, and drawing on Greek mythology directly, Hippocrates is thought to have based his medical work upon the tale of Pandora, the first woman whose arrival as a separate 'race' into a world of already existing men facilitated Hippocrates' essentialising of female sexuality, the difference of which then led him to qualify the existence of 'women's diseases' and the need to medically treat women differently (King 1998, 23). Although the wandering uterus was eventually disregarded as a theory, thoughts on 'women's problems' as stemming from the uterus persisted well into the 19th century, mobilising a Victorian understanding of a weak and vulnerable femininity rooted in psychosomatic and psychodynamic science (Bowlby 2007, 48; Allison and Roberts 1994, 246). The work by Jean-Martin Charcot positions hysteria as a sexually-motivated disorder – that hysterical symptoms in a woman can be produced through the psychic trauma induced by sexual contact (Showalter 1993, 287; Allison and Roberts 1994, 19 – 247). He goes on to present women as having an enervated nervous system, stating this as the reason for their vulnerability to the disorder; were they more resilient to stress, psychic, and physical traumas, then they would not suffer so (Allison and Roberts 1994, 248). Using this remarkably simplistic and self-referential theory, Charcot confirms an already familiar bias – that females are inferior individuals, and that hysteria confirms the existence of their aberrant and deviant nature. Treatment, at this point in time, involved institutionalisation in order to counter the females' 'excessive' behaviour (Ramas 1980, 474; Allison and Roberts 1994, 250).

The traumatised woman starts to fold together here in the contemporary moment; she is helpless, broken, vulnerable – yet responsible – and, critically, requires treatment (Haaken 1996, 1072; Armstrong 1994). Psychiatric and medical discourses still hold a lot of weight in articulating this cultural slant by constructing woman-blaming theories for abuse, and suggesting ideas of 'victim-personalities' (Alcoff and Gray 1993, 262). Instead of inciting a call for social change, the response has been to clinicalise sexual violence and reduce it to psychological variables that necessitate individual treatment (Armstrong 1994, Cvetkovich 2003, 55). As I discussed in the previous plateau, therapeutic approaches frequently riff off of Freud's Oedipal triangle in order to guide intervention strategies, and this happens even or especially when the framing is feminist (Cvetkovich 2003, 4). Considering feminist therapy as a 'separate speciality' from the view of biological and emotional differences between men and women falls short of questioning gender as an ontological status, and results in the mechanisms of oppression being inadvertently and unavoidably sustained (Worell and Remer [1996] 2003, 2; Cosgrove 2002, 94). Equally, it becomes much more difficult to effectively approach the topic of sexual violence without orientating and shaping the individual in question.

I write this project as someone who has experienced sexual violence. Violence has been a part of my life since I was fifteen, and I have struggled to narrate my own experience in a way that makes sense to

me. I have not been able to fit the normative shape of trauma in part because of the particular feminised tendencies it takes on. Although I identify as a woman, the shape of the traumatised woman that is engendered through popular culture and therapeutic approaches is something that didn't sit well with me.

I reached out to a therapist a few years ago. What prompted me to make the connection was a tequila-fuelled outburst on an undergraduate fieldtrip to Barcelona in 2013, ten years after the abuse had ended. I was crying, some concerned friends told me the next day, and talking about some man who used to put me to sleep and rape me. "Are you ok?" they said. "I'm fine!" I replied. In truth, it was the first time I'd spoken about it with anyone. When I contacted the therapist initially, I did so because I just didn't really feel that upset. I wasn't sure if it was normal, and I was looking for someone to tell me that, actually, I was doing ok. But, as it turned out, I wasn't doing ok. I sat there awkwardly after being asked to embrace a silence that might help me 'let go' in order to finally precipitate crying as the expected somatic response. When the tears failed to come, I was a failure; I was aberrant with my lack of crying. I went home and tried to cry. I even looked at some pictures of my mother, who was dying of cancer at the time I was being abused, to try and help it along a bit.

I carried on going to sessions for several years, though, primarily because I thought that there was something wrong with me – that I wasn't presenting the right symptoms. My therapist and I visited and re-visited the same topics and themes, and it became tiring. There were several things I learned. I learned that the therapist came across as knowing a lot more about sexual violence than I did. I learned that my abuse had been my fault. I also learned that, unless I 'healed', it would probably happen to me again. These teachings were implicit, being carefully folded into conversations that, through the techniques of attachment-based theory I discussed in the previous plateau, centred on my relationship with my parents, which had been fragile at the time. My mother had been ill, and I didn't get on with my father. My response, according to the therapist, had been to turn to this man: my abuser. The idea that I had invited an abuser into my life simply because I had been behaving like a solipsistic little so-and-so by not getting on with my parents was really quite galling. I don't feel that I turned to anyone. He came to me, and he groomed me. I started to realise that what was happening in therapy was that my abuse was being de-politicised, and individualised instead.

Writing in 1972, Félix Guattari ([1972] 2015, 88) talks about the tendency of medical specialists to "miss" the subject as the result of atomised and exclusive practices in which analysis becomes contained, rather than health problems being treated in view of whole fields including the biological, historical, familial, social, and so on. In my experience of psychotherapy, I was being observed through an historical medical discourse that essentialised me as a traumatised woman. I was not an individual, but a patient-subject, and the imperative for me was to undergo a particular self-care based on a framework that was eliminating of the specifics of my own traumatic experiences. Critically, there was

an expectation for me to recognise that I was in need of help. This falls under what Michel Foucault calls 'the care of the self', which refers broadly to the focus on devoting care to the maintenance of the body, cultivating it in such a way as to function effectively within normative social ideals (White 2014, 491). The increased involvement of medical practices in this ethic, Foucault ([1986] 1990, 57) writes, has resulted in "the inducement to acknowledge oneself as being ill or threatened by illness". It wasn't so much the case that I was refusing of any help whatsoever, but the help to which I was expected to accede wasn't actually helpful because it began from a pathological starting point that wasn't in keeping with my experiences, it also necessitated a submission to the shape of the traumatised woman, and it involved an orientation towards a future that had already been decided as constitutive of happiness.

In the moments between the therapist and I there was an intimate sharing of some of my most intimate moments, and my aspiration was for empathy and empowerment. Lauren Berlant writes that "intimacy builds worlds", and that intimacy involves an aspiration about a narrative that is shared in a space of comfort, with a hope that the story will turn out in a particular way (Berlant 1998, 281). But the world being built between myself and my therapist was one in which I usurped myself. By speaking my story I was not experiencing empowerment; I was having it re-framed back at me through the effecting of a public/private distinction that was erasing any sense of the tacit cultural sanctioning of violence (Gorton 2007, 337). There was a lot of head-shaking and a feeling that what had happened was awful, unjust. Why did this happen? To draw on Denise Riley's (2005, 69) discussion of 'why' as a rhetoric used in scenes of mourning to rouse self-exoneration, the esoteric and elliptical *whys* voiced in my therapy sessions carried a metaphysical imperative that relieved any social accountability, or prevented it from being discussed, at least. This approach revealed an inherent and frustrating contradiction. Despite working to isolate the abuse from its social and cultural grounding, *I* was being figured as a social ill. *I* – or the shape of the traumatised woman – was an ill to society with my vulnerable, tempting body. My story, it seemed, was being used to cover up a broader landscape of social problems.

In Trisha Yeo's (1997, 54) careful critique of Ellen Bass and Laura Davis' 1988 text *The Courage to Heal* she discusses the authors' promotion of a therapeutic approach that encourages individuals to connect with their 'inner child' in order to respond to the demand of self-care. "What does little Freya need?" I remember being asked. I was encouraged to speak to 'little Freya' in order to reassure her that I would keep her safe from future harm. Yeo (1997, 55) writes that this is a powerful example of a discourse of 'healing' that interiorises the locus of the trauma, which both deflects the need to re-examine the social structures that enable gendered violence, and re-affirms that a sense of responsibility lies with the individual. What it also does is capture the individual within essential feminine qualities by encouraging them to not only accept their vulnerability, but to channel it toward nurturing 'the child within' (Yeo 1997, 55; Alcoff and Gray 1993, 272).

The figuration of mother-child as a technique of healing predicates on orientating the individual toward a particular happiness that legitimises patriarchal family values (Gorton 2007, 338, Yeo 1997, 55). The story of my abuse was shaped as a case of me having strayed from the path of happiness – that if I had only stayed on track by nurturing the right sorts of connections then I would have placed myself proximate to, uninterrupted, the general upward mobility and reliable intimacy characteristic of what Lauren Berlant (2011, 10) has called The Good Life. The Good Life, here, is an increasingly out-of-reach fantasy in which any precarity or troubles encountered while trying to attain it are marked as simply 'bad luck' or self-propogated (Berlant 2011, 11; Berlant 1998, 282). My troubles, then, had been the result of my misalignment with The Good Life.

Happiness, Sara Ahmed (2010, 51) has written, involves being aligned with others – of labouring to face the right way. For me, getting back on to the path of happiness necessitated labouring to accept my vulnerability, and submitting to my role as the traumatised woman. 'Healing' I have realised, translates to 'healing correctly'. Healing is access to a happiness that involves some things and not others. For example, what I wanted to talk about in therapy was not 'little Freya', or how to avoid lending myself out to 'those sorts' of people again; what I wanted to talk about were the peculiar and seemingly aberrant feelings and sensations that I had – the things that I didn't understand – like how I had orgasms in my sleep during the period of abuse, and that I had thoughts about the man, wondering what my body was like for him. It had all been left to my imagination because I was never awake when it happened, and I couldn't quieten my curiosity, however perverse it seemed. These sensations, which betrayed my conscious ideas of what was right and wrong, were matched with a persistent teeth-grinding anxiety, nausea, sweating, and panicking, which unexpectedly and sharply desisted, and was followed by a decade-long period of seeming disconnection with what had happened. I just didn't really think about it.

Healing is access to a happiness that involves some things, but not *those* things. I was doing trauma wrong, and I wasn't fitting the shape of the healing woman on her road back to happiness. Exploring my explicit thoughts were not part of that road. I was desperate to pick through these sticky nuances of my life, of my sexuality, but they were steadily edited out of the conversations in the prescribed course towards happiness. This is a key issue explored by Cvetkovich (2003, 3) whereby she identifies trauma as a "pathologising rubric" in which therapeutic, and sometimes feminist, approaches orientate the individual toward particular feelings, and what things are considered ok to feel good or bad about. Her focal point is lesbian practices, and how the connection between incest and lesbianism is either marked as causal and perverse, or is curiously silenced in literature. She looks for moments of traumatic response that connect unashamedly to the textures of everyday experience – sexual pleasure, "dangerous desires" – points at which the narrative of therapeutic healing is interrupted (Cvetkovich 2003, 4 and 89).

I didn't have the words to say it at the time but what I know now is that sexual violence is grounded in complex worlds that are not reducible to a sanitised image of victim and perpetrator. Drawing on Cvetkovich, I am resistant to the work on personal transformation that is undertaken in therapy (Gorton 2007, 343). To be encouraged to invest in The Good Life is, in Berlant's (2011, 11) terms, "a fantasy [that] has become *more* fantasmatic – with less and less relation to how people can live". Ordinary existence is saturated with confusing, weaving affects and emotions of perversity, lust, pleasure, and pain. Traumatic feelings are not an (apolitical) medical problem in need of a cure but are felt experiences (Cvetkovich 2003, 47). In my experience, having sexual feeling erased from the discussion framed me as bizarrely innocent (despite being seen as concomitantly responsible), and hidden from the thickness of everyday life, as if I had no part in it at all – no sexuality, or any murky secrets to tell.

This, then, is a project that seeks to muddy the waters by problematising the shape of trauma to write it as otherwise. In Janice Doane and Devon Hodges' 2001 text – *Telling Incest* – they offer analyses of fictionalised narratives of sexual violence that are grounded in the complicated fabrics of gender, sexuality, race, and class in order to acknowledge the asymmetries of power at work without presenting a victim that is passive, over sentimentalised, or desexualised. Shifting the standpoint of telling in this way settles sexual violence back down into the tangled surroundings from which it has been lifted. One of my claims in this project is that sexual violence is not, or at least is not *only*, something that happens *to* someone. Lifting the victim and perpetrator from the shapes that code them as such does not detract from the enormity of the abuse in question, but it permits a space in which to think through the conditions under which it happens (Naples 2003, 1177).

It is necessary now to expand the discussion from the therapist's room. We have seen what narratives play out in there. In the section that follows, I expand on Ahmed's ideas around the imperative to happiness to consider how feelings that are framed as either 'good' or 'bad' form a sort of map of trauma, prescribing how to navigate it to a 'healed' state. I talk about the obstructions I have come up against in failing to map my path through trauma 'correctly', and I suggest that there is a way to utilise the shame that I have felt. Shame, I argue, is productive of a thinking (and writing) space that is sensitive to the mobility of trauma. It helps to present trauma as having a spatiality that moves around and manifests differently in varying contexts, cropping up at both unexpected times and places.

Image Two

I was really ill recently with the flu and I had a fever-infected dream – or set of dreams – in which I kept waking up but not waking up. Eventually I was awake, but I'm not sure at what point I awoke. There were four or five stages of waking, I think. With each waking, my eyes would open to the ceiling. It always looked the same.

My mother was at home crying because I was never there. She hated me, I think. The night she died I was late again. I sat by her bedside at the hospital and we were on our own for a bit. I remember feeling irritated because I knew she was putting it on and that she would open her eyes soon. I was told that her eyes had been open only a few minutes before I arrived, so she can't have been that bad surely. But they didn't open. I wonder if it's because she didn't want to look at me. I went home and had a bath. I didn't even wait for her to die.

The man liked me to have my eyes shut, I think. Or maybe he opened them occasionally, I don't know. He might have found it funny to watch my pupils roll to the back of my head. There was always a lot of red wine and Leffe beer and chatter, and Cheech and Chong on the telly which I never thought was any good. But then there would be silence. I'm not sure where everyone went. That's when my eyes would start to close.

I have a good friend now who drinks Leffe beer and I find it really difficult to look at the bottle. I wish he would drink something else.

Mapping Trauma

It would be very easy to say that this project is full of bad feelings. It is about things that make people feel bad. When Sara Ahmed (2010, 5) writes about the imperative to happiness, she deftly points out that the belief that you can measure happiness is a belief that you can measure feelings. One of the things at stake here is that there is an assumption that it is possible to know in advance what will generate good feeling (Ahmed 2010, 8). The face of happiness, Ahmed (2010, 11) also notes, looks rather like the face of privilege. It is raced, gendered, and sexualised, and it is necessary to embody certain ideals, as if proximity to those norms and ideals creates happiness (Ahmed 2010, 11). In the previous section I pointed toward how good feeling, or healing, was accessible via a certain path of embodying essential feminine qualities, and accepting being read as vulnerable. I stood in the way of the path to my own happiness by resisting those things, and by wanting to talk about feelings that were identified as bad.

There comes a presumption that bad feelings are backward, and good feelings are forward, and progressive (Ahmed 2008, 12). Because I did not lean toward the shapes of good feeling (woman as vulnerable and nurturing), and because I threw bad feelings in the way, I was encountered as resistant – a blockage to moving forward (Ahmed 2010, 11). 'Bad feelings' in my experience of therapy were sexual feelings, and sexual responses that complicated the distinction between myself and my abuser. Cvetkovich (2003, 88) explores the interconnectedness of pleasure and danger and how the two are kept apart in narratives of incest in order to preserve the 'female victim' response of the abused individual, refusing all association with sexuality or anger. Reacting to this normative frame of sexual abuse, Dorothy Allison ([1995] 2017, 47) writes in her memoir of cornering her abusive step-father with a

knife: “his fear was sexual and marvellous – hateful and scary but wonderful, like orgasm, like waiting a whole lifetime and finally coming”. The link between sexual abuse and a sense of sexuality is strong here, and it indicates the need to track the complexity of worlds in which sexual abuse happens, rather than trying to isolate it from those contexts.

The assumption that happiness is in a certain direction, and that good and bad feelings are either backward or forward, implies a certain mapping of trauma. Placed in conjunction with the catastrophic event-based and pathologising model of trauma that firmly attempts to identify its characteristics, what unfolds is a problem that has been of recent interest to the geography literature – finding a spatiality of trauma (see Burk 2006; Perera 2010; Trigg 2009; Walker 2010). Trauma has a complex relation to space in the sense that it seems unmappable because its mobility between contexts, situations, and bodies defies geospatial logics (Coddington and Micieli-Voutsinas 2017, 1). Yet, the way that much trauma theory and iterations of ‘healing’ speak of trauma is as though it *is* easily mappable, and they look to create a universalising map of traumatic experience that is eliminating of its specific manifestations. Trauma is an undefinable thing, Lauren Berlant (2001, 43) writes, and the huge volume of discipline-specific scholarship that have amassed different knowledges are inevitably marked by lapses and conflicts in understanding (Luckhurst 2008, 4). Trauma is not containable, or ownable, and it is not mappable – at least not in a universalising way (Luckhurst 2008, 5). Positioning trauma as a universal concept has the effect of rendering it empty and transparent – it becomes an indeterminate abstraction which is paradoxical because anyone who describes themselves as ‘traumatised’ is an expert, and is the only expert possible to their trauma (Berlant 2001, 41 and 42). Ultimately, no one else can access that expertise (Berlant 2001, 43).

The call by geographers for a ‘spatial turn’ to studying trauma can be used to think and map trauma in a way that is more sensitive to its specifics (Walker 2010, 52). The question “where is trauma?” problematises the notion that trauma might be isolatable to the psyche, and that it looks the same in all psyches (Walker 2010, 58). Thinking trauma in spatial terms highlights the complexity of the relationship between place and subject formation – because trauma dissolves any logical continuity, the spatial connections between a body and a place don’t necessarily have to fit in to narratives that might focus on causality in order to consider what might or might not be traumatic (Berlant 2001, 43 and 44; Walker 2010, 53). What I suggest here is a spatial exploration of feelings and affects, particularly shame, in order to locate trauma outside of its conventional mappings, and outside of the resulting clearly defined objects – such as the traumatised woman. Shame is pivotal to conceptualising the mobility and flexibility of trauma because it is expressive of the acute sensitivity of oneself depending on context – it highlights that there are nuances and idiosyncrasies of how people live out their trauma (Cvetkovich 2003, 47; Johnston 2019, 218). This is my political motive, although, following Denise Riley (2005, 7), I avoid carving too heavy a line between “the apparent froth of the everyday and the graver tone of the political” simply because the rough surfaces of life inflect both. I think that we try to

file those surfaces down a little when we claim to speak about the political, because it is easier to argue a case for an object that is clearly defined.

Ahmed (2008, 1) considers how certain bodies are the origin of bad feeling. My body makes others feel bad because I insist on talking explicitly about things that have happened to me that they don't want to hear. My body is shameful, perhaps, and shame might be considered a bad feeling. When Elspeth Probyn (2005, 35) talks about shame, she talks about it as productive "even or especially when it feels bad". A way of thinking shame spatially here is as an affect of proximity; it is about bodies being close to one another (Probyn 2005, 34; Johnston 2019, 218). However, it makes us feel proximity differently; my body makes others feel bad because they are proximate to what they don't want to talk about. There isn't an easy sense of commonality between bodies, here, not like empathy (Probyn 2005, 96). But that is precisely what makes shame productive; Probyn (2005, 97) argues that when it comes to shame, a friction is produced. It generates heat. Heat is energy.

Shame, then, can be thought of as productive of space – not only of the space between one body and another, but of the writing space. Shame compels me to use this writing space to tell a story with heat – with blushed cheeks and sweaty palms. I tell a story that is not motivated by the 'good feelings' thought to be directive of normative happiness, but instead use a sense of what Eve Sedgwick (2003, 64) would call "shame-creativity" to confront trauma head-on, embracing all of its twists and turns rather than refuse them. When Probyn (2005, 131) talks about "writing shame", she talks about it as an exposure, about grappling with interests and hoping to engage others. Shame is intimate, but it is a frictional intimacy – it indicates closeness and sharing, but not necessarily comfort (Donovan and Moss 2017, 11). What I write is uncomfortable, not only for me but perhaps for the reader, in that the words might poke at attachments and attunements they have about the world. The words close down the fantasy that violence happens 'out there', and that it looks and feels in particular ways (Berlant 1998, 284; Donovan and Moss 2017, 7). It is precisely in this discomfort that new thinking is generated – it forges new attachments and ideas which might change the way one thinks and acts.

In this plateau you will already have seen the short moments that sit in-between the sections. It is instructive to think of them as a map of partial fragment-images, rather than an attempt at a complete memoir (Nettelbeck 1998, 3). Of course, a sense of memoir is inescapable here, and it is important, too – I arrive at this topic having been implicated by traumatic experiences (Moss 2001, 15). But, following Deleuzian difference, the centrality of the subject is disrupted: I write myself as only one actor in the production and reproduction of world(s) (Humphreys 2005, 840). Rather than tending toward any naturalisation of individual experience, what I seek to do is problematise the idea that such a thing is possible. These fragment-images aren't intended as reference points from which to signal real points of truth. The truth is that this is not my story alone. It is *a* story. It is a story that is deeply personal, but

not reducible to personal experience. It is a story of sensation, of bodies human and non-human, and glimmers of memory. Fireworks, cancer, and beer bottles.

This project, then, does not come from a place of interiority imbibed with pre-existent meanings. Instead, it comes from an affective urge to approach a history and an historical present that has left me cold in the light of trying to recognise it as *mine*, as a woman; as a traumatised subject. Trying to form such stilted recognition has involved hemming myself in around the flashy refrains that trace the woman-shape, and it has involved trying to orientate myself as correctly traumatised. Interiority, I would argue, is actually something that is often imposed upon me. 'How to be a woman' is a lesson that I have been learning for a long time now. Or, more specifically, I have been learning how I am not a woman. Perhaps I am considered even less of a woman since I began this project and started speaking my trauma more explicitly. Some have said brazenly. Not a topic for the dinner table. When I talk about it I can feel people wanting to turn away from me.

Like I failed to fit the shape of the traumatised woman in therapy, I now fail to present myself as a woman in the form of discretion and politeness. My unwillingness to redact sentences about my abuse and insert metaphors and euphemisms for the sake of palatability marks me as conventionally unfeminine, and wilful (Ahmed 2014). My choice of PhD topic is unnecessary; aggravating. "Why would you want to drag all of that up?" As a reaction, I've become sort of prickly. I often come up against terms describing me as too much of this and too little of that. I'm rude; uncompromising. I get "wound up". Sara Ahmed (2010, 65) would say that I 'spoil' the happiness of others because, yet again, I refuse to convene with happiness as an object that points toward certain things but not others.

Sexual violence is not seen so easily, because people don't want to see it. As I have moved alongside this project I have noticed how many people don't want to look. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that sexual violence *is* seen, but it is seen only through the remediating frames of popular culture – the same frames that shave off the bits of stories that they don't want to tell. These frames distance sexual violence from the intimacy of everyday life – an intimacy which is assumed to denote reciprocity and harmony (Donovan and Moss 2017, 11). Sexual violence is something that happens somewhere else, to someone else. It is "outside the range" of ordinary human experience, or "outside the range" of ordinary intimate connections (Brown 1995). One of my principal intentions in this project is to re-attach sexual violence to the seeming comfort and safety of the everyday; to draw into the light the small spaces which barely register as anything but residue – a conversation with a stranger, an encounter on a bus – and show how they are constitutive of the very thick fabric of violence (Berlant 1998, 283).

In the plateau that follows I will talk about how shame propels the creation of a new figure: the woman-monster. The woman-monster is an aberration from the shape of trauma, and from the shape of the traumatised woman. She is a figure that collects together the possibilities, virtual and actual, that describe a violent life. Not *my* violent life, but *a* violent life. Violence here refers to the forces of

encounter. There is violence in the images written in this plateau, that is, the images are a proliferation of encounters that communicate a reading of traumatic experiences, but they are fractured; they don't conform to the shape of trauma. The woman-monster emerges from each of these encounters, undoing the shape of trauma and effecting a line-of-flight. She pushes out the habits of perception and sparks the conditions of creation to present trauma, not loaded with properties and characteristics, but trauma as transmission of signs and sensations.

Deleuze writes that you have to be forced to think. "Something in the world forces us to think, and that something is not an object of recognition, but of encounter" (Deleuze [1968] 2014, 183). The writing in this project forces the reader to look at the woman-monster as imperceptible; she doesn't submit to an identifiable form. In the following plateau she develops into a character – Harriet – whose narrative will spill and surge throughout the rest of this thesis. But Harriet, my woman-monster, is not a subject that is recognisable as traumatised. She is a thread to pull on with which to articulate the singularities of experience. She is politically subversive in that she unravels the shape of both woman and trauma, but she escapes being typified. Neither woman nor monster, she is a becoming – an invention of things to come.

Image Three

You smell like sex, the man would say to me. You smell like sex. I didn't know whether it was a compliment; I wasn't really sure what sex smelled like. He recommended that I use a douche but I have since learned that these are extremely bad for you. I can honestly say that there are very few things in this world that feel as unnatural as irrigating your own vagina.

One of my friends, the one I was very close to, never questioned why I often stayed later than they did. Similarly, I never asked why they often left me behind. You should start going in there first, my friend said. He likes you. One of my fondest memories of this friend is from one New Year's Eve when we were high on mushrooms and ketamine and we sat on the curb and watched some fireworks in the distance. We couldn't stop laughing and poking each other's faces. I remember thinking the fireworks were so colourful and soft.

Having semen dribbling down the inside of your thigh is an extremely inconveniencing experience. Sometimes it happens immediately afterwards when you go to the toilet, which is fine. But sometimes it happens an hour or so later, when you have re-dressed and are going about your day. Does it shoot up further sometimes? I'm not sure. It used to upset me a little when it happened like this, because I remember thinking it felt like the man was still inside me. My stupid body. You smell like sex.

3. *Harriet* and the Writing-Machine

This plateau turns towards the experimental space of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the writing-machine. It is a concept that provides a means through which to express life without relying on the idea that truth exists somehow outside of ourselves, and that truth can be accessed and used to shape an objective understanding of world/s. The 'truth' being approached in this project is the seemingly objective shape of trauma and its according shape of the traumatised woman, which are instructive in describing both what the event of trauma *is* and how it *should* feel and be responded to. It is this simplifying logic that allows for the de-politicising and individualising of sexual violence, marked particularly by the rhetoric of sexual violence as victim-precipitated. Here, the writing-machine – focused through my narrative *Harriet* – is a technique with which to offer relief from the shape of trauma; it shakes off signification and symbolism so that what can come through is the generation and expression of ideas in themselves. When it comes to writing trauma, what this involves is approaching it quite literally without prior thought, rather than attempting to write a likeness of what might already be thought to constitute 'trauma'.

In the first section I outline how writing itself is a methodological commitment, delving through the literature of different expressive, feminist, and performative approaches to writing in order to locate my own method as one that turns to Deleuze to query sexual difference so that writing trauma might be relived from the framing of writing *as* a 'traumatised woman'. In the following section I make this discussion more concrete by detailing what the writing-machine is and how it works. It is here that I also discuss fully what I mean when I say 'trauma is singular'. In the space of the writing-machine, transcendent, essentialising, and guiding ideas that frame and shape experience are left behind. What is foregrounded instead are sensations which can be responded to without being informed by previous experience. Put differently, in the writing-machine, the shape of trauma shatters – it no longer has a fixed, self-evident form. It becomes a sign that stands alone, signifying not by casting back to the realm of lived experience in order to formulate understanding, but signifying trauma through affective force, with a 'thisness' that is differential only to itself. In the third section of this plateau I discuss how, in the writing-machine, shame and bad feelings are released from the signifying registers that connect them to ideas of what 'healing' and 'happiness' *should* look like. They become detached from my personal experiences and pass into the *impersonal* space of singular sensation. They stand alone as signs, functioning independently, and catalysing the possibility of thinking trauma differently.

This leads on to the final substantive section of the plateau, in which I discuss how the sensations of shame and bad feelings motor the fabulation of *Harriet* within my writing-machine. Fabulation, here, is a Bergsonian term, and it shouldn't be misunderstood as the mere 'making-up' or whimsy of something (Mullarkey 2007, 54). The telling of stories gives rise to images that "short-circuit" common

sense, thereby generating new possibilities (Bogue 2007, 106). Fabulation, then, is not fictitious in the simplistic use of the term, but serves a concrete function; "myth-making" makes events come alive – we are capable of feeling what we read or see in a very present and immanent way (Bergson [1935] 1922, 109; Mullarkey 2007, 56). The fabulation of *Harriet* is not about fantasy, but about putting past experiences to work in a creative way that invokes something different that is not reducible to those past experiences. In the story there are figures and objects that may be slightly recognisable, but this recognition is only partial. They are disconnected from common themes and symbolic understandings, and so it is difficult to locate them within something that might be termed 'the big picture'. The story proceeds as a series of disjointed, fuzzy, drunk-images marked by the sign of trauma – the singular sensations of which are followed by Harriet, the central figure. Following the sign of trauma is how the writing-machine avoids imposing form onto matter; I explain that both the writer and reader must arrive at the story with no ears, eyes, or mouth because the sensations of trauma must be explored blindly if they are to be responded to without relying on pre-existent signifiers (Lambert 2012, 29). It is this style of responding that effects Harriet's becoming as a woman-monster. Harriet is not contained by molar entities such as 'woman' or 'traumatised' and, as she feels her way through trauma by following its sign, she is free to undergo a sort of evolution that renders her steadily less and less perceptible as a figure. She is a line-of-flight from the shape of trauma because she slips between and evades any modes of identification. It is not possible to locate any final point, since this would put an end to her flight; she proceeds to enter into and merge with the sensations of the narrative in a continuous zone of shifting. The end of this plateau signals the beginning of the narrative itself, but is first preceded by some thoughts commenting on the style of writing employed in *Harriet*.

Writing Unlike a Woman

In this project, writing is the research method. It is a technique for signalling instabilities. Writing is always a technique, of course, but what it is a technique for depends on how you approach it. A number of writers, most notably Anna Gibbs, Heather Kerr, and Amanda Nettlebeck have emphasised the importance of writing as a process of research as part of an academic movement called "fictocriticism", which I came across in the course of trying, somewhat glibly, to find a shape for my writing. I have found fictocriticism useful in signalling a strategy of writing that is emergent – a thinking-through rather than a residue of thought (Nettelbeck 1998, 5). The reaction that fictocriticism rouses, Gibbs (2003, 310) states, is against the perceived tendency of academic writing to be used to communicate a knowledge that has already been formed. It often refers, quite literally, to the act of placing hands to keyboard and *writing up* what is thought to have been found (Rhodes 2015, 290; Gibbs 1997, n.p.; Gibbs 2005, n.p.). However, if research-writing is exclusively exercised in this way, then the possibilities for research begin to close down, and it becomes easier to consider words as capable of shaping an objective truth – as if they had somehow always already existed on the page. In the context

of this project, the words that describe the shape of trauma, and the shape of woman, could all be considered external to the hands that produce them.

My intention here is not to provide a statement of how writing 'should' be or look, but rather to map out how we could write otherwise – more responsively – in a way that the priority of the researcher becomes folded *into* the text, such that the interconnectedness of the subject with the fabric of Life reveals a much more nuanced set of relations than the traditional object-subject distinction (Muecke 2002, 108; Donovan and Moss 2017, 10). This project, then, can be positioned against a backdrop of a line of thinkers and scholars seeking to detach from the idea of the intellect as a presupposition, and from the possibility of an unmediated reality accessible by the all-knowing subject – what Gilles Deleuze would call the Image of thought (see Lambert 2012, 24-44, and Deleuze [1968] 2014, 171-221 on the *Image of thought*; Nietzsche 1973, 33-55 *On the Prejudices of Philosophers*; Whitehead 1948, 1-20 *The Origins of Modern Science*, also Stengers 2003, 1-13 *Scientific Passions*). What I appeal to also ties in with Kathleen Stewart's (2017, 196) statement of research as having an "unfortunate affective habit of snapping at the world as if the whole point of being and thinking is just to catch it in a lie". The Truth is out there, so to speak. You just have to find it, and then write it down. The objective truth, however, is certainly not what I seek, and the writing in – or rather *of* – this project is instead the method of choice; it is a form of empiricism.

Fictocriticism's use of writing as an empiric is convincing insofar as it avoids committing to a clearly fixed proposition, enabling the writer to use writing in order to get to grips with the production of meaning (Nettelbeck 1998, 9). This, Anna Gibbs (2007, 223) says, is what facilitates a form of resistance to codified communication. Writing as an intervention into what it means to be a woman writing within genres that are shaped mostly by men is something that I have spent a lot of time thinking about whilst trying to articulate and understand more precisely what the feminism of my project refers to (Gibbs 2003, 309). Is it the act of writing that makes this project feminist? Yes – but not completely, or at least not in the way that might be expected. I am wary of creating a project that might be termed *écriture feminine*, not because French feminist theory has not been effective in puncturing the power structures of language, but because it does not go far enough with the question of difference. Theorists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray are not essentialist in a sense, because they avoid grounding their work in ideas of biological difference – they instead see difference as composed within structures of signification that have historically excluded women (Fielding 2003, 1; Dallery 1989, 52). However, 'difference' for these thinkers is still inflected with essentialism because it centres on ideas of sexual difference – taking the rhetoric of the female body rather than the male body as the starting point. When Cixous (and Cohen, K. and Cohen, P. 1976, 885) says "Let the priests tremble, we are going to show them our sexts", she is seeking to interrupt what she sees as the primacy of discourse as that which constitutes sexual difference, however the very prioritising of sexual difference maintains a certain

reliance on universalising inscriptions, or ideas of sex organs. In short, the essence of what makes a woman still lurks.

Fictocriticism is, to an extent, indebted to French feminist theory, however it seems to grapple at times more carefully with locating a non-essentialising feminism. In *Frictions: An Anthology of Fiction by Women*, Anna Gibbs and Alison Tilson (1982) are clear about the difficulties they faced in defining a 'feminist writer' when collecting material for the anthology. They conclude that labelling the book feminist might not be a useful strategy at all, if it allows the reader to forget that *all* writing is political. Likewise, in Heather Kerr and Amanda Nettelbeck's (1998) edited collection *The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism*, there is a focus on writing *as* women without trying to locate any essentially feminine qualities. In a chapter on the 20th century writer, Dorothy Parker, Robyn Ferrell (1998, 27) describes how Parker's foul-mouthed wit was always inescapably captured as 'women's writing'. *Dear God, please stop making me write like a woman,* Parker types onto a typewriter lent to her by Ernest Hemingway (Ferrell 1998, 28). The cue that I draw from this is that writing *as* a woman does not necessitate a turn toward the text as an inscription of existing meanings (am I writing *like* a woman?) which need interrupting with different ideas of 'woman' (Gibbs 2005, n.p.). The cue instead is to *do* something else with the text. Create new meaning outside the category of woman (Nettelbeck 1998, 12).

To perform, or enact, this cue requires a turn to Deleuzian difference, in which there can be no essence because difference, for Deleuze, is not difference *between* or *in relation to* – difference is difference in itself (see Deleuze [1968] 2014, 38-91). Following Deleuze, it would not do to simply interrupt these shapes of trauma or the traumatised woman by introducing another form. Deleuze (1997, 1) says that "to write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience. Literature rather moves in the direction of the ill-formed or the incomplete". Stopping writing *like a woman*, then, means using writing to attend to the singularities of experience of 'woman' and 'trauma', rather than attempt a likeness of. There is a zone of indiscernibility, Deleuze (1997, 1) says, which can be approached through writing, and which denotes a space in which "one can no longer be distinguished from *a* woman, *an* animal, or *a* molecule – neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and non-preexistent". There is a prickliness between feminist and Deleuzian theory here that Elizabeth Grosz has observed, and it is, in part, understandable at this point; 'indiscernible' could be taken to imply 'the-same-as', thereby quieting the struggles of women (which are further complicated when it comes to the intersections of race and sexuality). However, this does not have to be the case; pure difference must be observed outside of a notion of "identity multiplied by *n* locations" because, otherwise, it remains attached to a regime of binary pairs and structures (Grosz 1993, 170). When Deleuze (and in his work with Guattari), conceive of a body as a discontinuous series of processes, intensities, and durations, they de-anchor 'woman' from the idea of universal and unchanging characteristics that might coagulate to form such a thing (Grosz 170). Restrictive metaphysical concepts thus are wiped away so that new

accounts and knowledges can be put together and it is this, I feel, that allows a dissolving of not only essential ideas of woman, but also the de-politicising and individualising registers of trauma (Grosz 1992, 169).

Deleuzian difference is a feminist imperative in this project, then, and writing-as-method is the technique through which to attend to it. Where writing, for *écriture feminine*, is an act of language rebellion against phallogocentrism – a call to arms for women to intercept text as a male-dominated space by using text itself – my writing is a problematising of universalities, and that is its feminism (Bartlett 2006, 7). I am trying to find a careful way around speaking 'trauma' and 'woman', such that those terms don't become stuck with certain perceived qualities (Ahmed 2004, 178). What I invoke, I hope, is a sense of movement – this isn't a writing that stands still in order to reflect an idea of the real, but is instead an active performance in response to world(s) as excess. Peggy Phelan (1997, 12) talks of "performative writing" as something of a redundant term in that all writing must enact something in excess of the motivation to write. What I write *is* representational, but it is a representation that "knows both that it is too late and that it is 'off'" (Phelan 1997, 12). The mimicry is the performance; I mimic scenes that have motivated the research, but without attempting to describe or preserve them as truth. Instead, following Phelan, and also Deleuze's (1997, 1) ideas of writing as "incomplete", the energy of the project lies in what is lost – in what I have been unable to reproduce. That is where space for a new, emerging body of trauma begins to unfold.

The imperative to write is a common technique for survivors of sexual violence as not only a practice of making sense of what has happened, but as a feminist form of empowerment. However, there are problems here in that the narratives can become caricatured and formulaic representations of victimhood (Wieskamp 2019, 137; Naples 2003, 1156). As I discussed in the previous plateau with the example of the 1990s talk show, narratives of sexual violence can become co-opted in order to sensationalise the vulnerability and perceived femininity of the writer (Wieskamp 2019, 138; Hesford 1999, 193). Even when feminist movements and mediators are involved, as Tanya Serisier (2018b, 55) has written recently, narratives do not necessarily escape being over-written in favour of emphasising 'victimhood'; this particular problem comes down to what Janice Haaken (1996, 1088; Cvetkovich 2003, 34) has provocatively identified as feminism's tendency to seize on sexual trauma as a vehicle with which to present cut-and-dry and incontrovertible proof of sexism.

Perhaps the problem here is that the shape (or spectre?) of woman haunts these narratives, with or without external modes of narrative distortion, and that this in itself is a limiting factor for the possibility of expression. As an example, an article by Wendy Hesford (1999, 194) talks about "the revenge fantasy", or narratives that seek to overturn the spectacle of victimisation by re-writing women as agents of aggression and anger in the telling of their abuse. The problem, here, for Hesford, is what she sees as an awkward element of futility: the stories still presume a victim – a raped female body. We can see

here how the positioning of these stories as a transgressive counter-culture is not capable of breaking open the dichotomy from which they seek to escape; without questioning the very notions of 'woman' or 'trauma', it is possible for dominant refrains – for example, that 'women will be raped' – to continue to speak through, and for, the narratives (Hesford, 1999, 196).

The key here, like Dorothy Parker's plea, is to stop writing *like a woman.* In this project, the writing is not an attempt to affirm pre-conceived idea of what 'woman' is. I write *as* a woman. Trauma, and the traumatised subject, are singular. I am not writing the likeness of woman, or the likeness of trauma. I write the sensation of both, with all of their disjointed materialities and temporalities. This is a writing of trauma as something that is incorrigibly incoherent, and it is a writing of myself as equally incoherent. What that amounts to is a slippery collection of work that attempts to shape an emerging body of trauma, with permeable and impermanent surfaces.

Trauma as a Machine

> "To think is to create – there is no other creation – but to create is first of all to engender 'thinking' in thought" (Deleuze [1968] 2014, 184).

The turn to Deleuzian difference helps to start re-thinking the shape of trauma, and the traumatised woman, using writing-as-method. Interrupting these shapes necessitates going beyond simply introducing another form to the mix, because the intention is to attend to the singularities of experience, rather than attempt a likeness *of*. Reflection, resemblance, and points of reference are, for Deleuze, limitations to thought (see Lambert 2012, 25-44). The problem of thinking, or ideas of what thought looks like, occupies Deleuze's entire literary corpus, gathering momentum in both his individual and collaborative work with Guattari before coming to rest in their final co-authored text "What Is Philosophy?" with their outlining of philosophy as the creation of concepts. In contrast to the philosophy of historical Western metaphysics (which turns towards an idea of truth from which to position concepts), concepts for Deleuze and Guattari ([1994] 2015, 39-41) are generative and non-referential; they do not rely on the already lived in order to take shape (Johnson 2019, 55). Deleuzian thought moves away from the idea of essence, and replaces it with a new essence – one that is not *a priori*: philosophy becomes an instituting of the plane of immanence – a plane which forms the absolute ground of philosophy, but does not exist outside of it (Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 41).

What Deleuze calls 'pure thought' or 'thought without an Image' is enabled, or effected, by art as a philosophical practice (See Lambert 2012, 2-24, also Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 198). Art is the praxis by which concepts come to life; it is a motor of pure expression in that it responds to a simple 'there is', which exists in itself without relation to the language that prescribes it (Johnson 2019, 54). This folds in with Deleuze's critique of interpretation, in which he traces a path from signification to

force (Sauvagnargues 2018, 5). We can think 'how does art feel, look, or sound?' instead of 'what does art feel, look, or sound *like*?' Art is not *like* anything; it is an initiator of something new, and it is a producer of affective force that cannot be reduced to or explained by signification. Deleuze's discussion of painting, particularly the works of Francis Bacon, is helpful in making this clearer: in talking about the "scrubbed zone" of the screaming mouth in Bacon's paintings, Deleuze ([1981] 2016, 42) considers how Bacon paints the scream more than the visible horror. The mouth is open and screaming, yes – that is part of the figuration of the horror – but the way Bacon paints establishes a relationship between that figuration, and the forces that sustain it. The visible spectacle "before which one screams" is absent from the painting; the focus is instead on the scrubbed zone of the screaming mouth – a deformation of form – in which the function is to render visible the invisible forces that emerge at the mouth as a scream (Deleuze [1981] 2016, 43). What is expressed is not what it *means* to scream (what do we think of as horrifying? What might they be screaming *about*?), but a pure scream. Put differently, the painting is not a representation of the perceptible force of the scream (a sight that is considered horrifying) but instead presents the imperceptible force that makes one scream (a scream in itself).

Painting, here, is pure thought; it is thinking that is thought through sensation alone (Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 198). When I talk about writing-as-method, I am talking about writing – like painting – as an artistic practice, an effector of pure thought. My approach is captured within the writing-machine, which is a generative concept put forward by both Deleuze and Guattari. The writing-machine pokes through in disparate bits and pieces throughout Deleuze and Guattari's separate and joint works, bringing together Deleuze's concerns for art as expression, and Guattari's concept of the machine, which politically orientates his critique of discursive formations and how those formations connect to social subjectification (Sauvagnargues 2018, 83). The machine, for Guattari, is a concept that assists an untangling from structuralism. It makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the concepts put forward in Deleuze's text *Difference and Repetition* by marking the sharp distinction between 'generality' and 'repetition', which is to say that repetition can only be considered in relation to that which cannot be replaced (Thornton 2017, 461). It is inherently anti-structural because it cannot be understood by revealing the structures that are thought to inherently lie 'beneath' (Thornton 2017, 462). Where structure can be related "as an element to other structures", the machine is "remote" (Guattari [1972] 2015 319). Guattari ([1972] 2015 322 and 323) describes machines as an "anti-production" that is, they *are* productive, but not in the sense that they are modelled on what has gone before – what they produce is something that is univocal, singular, a "repetition of the particular". The writing-machine, then, is writing that ceases to emerge from an interpretation that draws on signification and the symbolic in order to affirm already-existing ideas; it is instead the expression and generation of ideas themselves (Johnson 2019, 57; Sauvagnargues 2018, 82).

By using the concept of the machine, writing is freed from structural ties and, in doing so, becomes capable of pointing out – through experimentation – the flawed, abstract formalism of structure itself (Sauvagnargues 2018, 84). The writing still conforms to a major language, but it bends and stretches what language can do. Words and phrases become elastic, and in doing so they disrupt qualities, characteristics, and the possibility of the existence of total ideas. What comes through is the generation of new sense, and new meaning, instead of the affirmation of things that 'everyone already knows' (Johnson 2019, 55). This describes what Deleuze and Guattari call a "minor literature", a notion they approach through the work of Franz Kafka. Not to be misunderstood as a literature that is composed by a cultural minority, minor literature refers to the minor *usage* of language within writing that sets into disequilibrium the regular patterns of practice that make things make 'sense' (Bogue 2003, 5). Critically, minor literature is a political performative because it subverts the compositions that ordinarily are understandable, and enables a process of becoming-other within a story, even if that story is telling of usual power configurations such as the family, the judicial space, and so on (Deleuze and Guattari [1975] 2016, 17; Bogue 2003, 114). The turn to Kafka is particularly illustrative of minor literature because he reconfigures representations of power structures in the social world through an experimentation with language (Bogue 2003, 115). What Kafka writes in, for example, *Metamorphosis*, is not a metaphor of Gregor Samsa turning into a cockroach as result of his catatonic-inducing job as a travelling salesman. "Kafka deliberately kills all metaphor…all signification" – Gregor *is* becoming-cockroach as an active disruption of the power relations that have formed his milieu up until that point (Deleuze and Guattari [1975] 2016, 20). Minor literature is, above all, linguistic action upon semantic and syntactic patterns in order to generate a machinic flow of ideas, that is, to generate the repetition of something different within a context that might overwise have been conventionally recognisable (Bogue 2003, 6).

As another example of minor literature, consider the first line of Samuel Beckett's short story *echo's bones*, rejected by Chatto and Windus as a "nightmare" due to its perceived incoherence, and only published eighty years later: "The dead die hard, they are trespassers on the beyond, they must take the place as they find it, the shafts and manholes back into the muck" (Nixon 2014, x; Beckett [1933] 2014, 3). Beckett's is a writing-machine that disrupts the already-known. It can perhaps be more clearly thought of as an expression-machine; it disorganises the forms of content and expression which Deleuze and Guattari identify as traditionally adhering to the order of identifiable content followed by reactive/reflective expression (Deleuze and Guattari [1975] 2016, 28). Conversely, Beckett *begins* with expression and conceptualises afterward (Deleuze and Guattari [1975] 2016, 29). In doing this, Deleuze describes Beckett's work as exhausting space, and exhausting the possible of words, writing deliberately jerkily and disjunctively so as to interrupt the "atomic" operation of language, and manipulate it instead into bendable flows (Deleuze and Uhlmann 1995, 7 and 13).

‘Bendable flows’ deftly captures the sense of movement in the writing-machine, and it is the term ‘machine’ that imbibes the concept with such a pragmatic effectiveness (Sauvagnargues 2018, 83). This, in turn, lays the groundwork for my own writing-machine project as political, active, and with a capacity for the production of thought. Like the composition of Beckett’s words, ‘machine’ is here understood as an assemblage of dependant parts that function together without working to affirm sense that has already been established. There is no unity or Whole to be interpreted; when I described the vignettes in the previous plateau as “partial fragment-images”, that is what I was getting at. I was not looking to use the writing space in order to respond to well-worn narratives and allegories of the traumatised woman; the pieces of writing were intended instead to function together, but separate from, the motifs, refrains, and ideals that ordinarily code content. In short, I was seeking to effect a surface of signs that *function* rather than *signify*.

The shift from signification (‘what does it mean?’) to functioning (‘what does it do?’) echoes the guiding principle of both Deleuze and Guattari’s work that critiques the structuralist flavour of psychoanalysis (for whom questions of meaning are central), and can be traced to Deleuze’s dedicated reading of Spinoza’s ethics of affect as force, capitulated in the question “what can a body do?” (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 299; Sauvagnargues 2018, 35, Smith 1997, xxii). We can think of the writing-machine as a body that is affectively forceful upon the reader, making the text function through the production of non-signifying signs before the words are captured by the usual themes that are turned to in order to make sense of stuff (Johnson 2019, 58). Deleuze’s ([1972] 2008, 3) account of the writing-machine as the production of signs is most detailed in his discussion of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, in which he rejects the common analyses that figure the text as a meditation on recollection, and memory. For Deleuze ([1972] 2008, 3), the ‘truth’ that is sought in the *Search* is not a true accessing of lost time – of the past – for there *is* no profound structure of the past to be accessed. When Proust’s protagonist tastes the madeleine, for example, Deleuze ([1972] 2008, 14) describes the old memory-sensation of the taste as attempting, but failing, to superimpose on to the present sensation. It is not, Deleuze ([1972] 2008, 4) asserts, possible to gather a true memory of the taste of the madeleine because the sensation of the tasting is singular, and “memory intervenes only as the means of an apprenticeship that transcends recollection”. The madeleine, then, is a sign – it signifies pure sensation, immanent with and different only to itself (Deleuze [1972] 2008, 27). Likewise, the writing of the *Search* becomes the apparatus capable of producing such signs (Smith 1997, xxii).

The sign of the madeleine is an appropriate entry point into discussing the singularities of trauma, and how my own writing-machine – the narrative, *Harriet*, which will begin in the next plateau – effects trauma as a sign. The reason that it is so important for me to present trauma as singular, and to employ the writing-machine in order to do so, is because it becomes the grounding point from which to really unpack the shape of trauma, and the shape of the traumatised woman. If there is no unity, or ideal content that can be ascribed to the experience of ‘trauma’, then it cannot be possible to wrap trauma up

within according refrains and narratives that stipulate an absolute model. 'Singularities', in Deleuze and Guattari's writing, are what populate virtual or actual matter – things that can be sensed, or touched (we can think of the materiality of an encounter, for example). Yet, the way in which singularities constitute things is slippery and evasive; they are not representable because they are unique, they have a 'thisness' that is differential only to themselves (Bryant 2012). Supporting this concept is Deleuze and Guattari's alliance with Gilbert Simondon's critique of the hylemorphic schema which, briefly put, details a dualism in which form is thought of as coming from *without*, according to a universal model, and is imposed onto passive matter (Shaviro 2014, 153; see also Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013 466-468, and Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 475). Singularities, then, enable the idea that matter – contra to the hylemorphic schema – is actually energetic, and that singularities themselves are central actors in processes of individuation. Yet it is necessary to be careful here not to align individuation with the individual (see Deleuze [1968] 2014, 336 and 337). In *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze ([1969] 2004, 63) writes that "singularities are turning points and points of inflection: bottlenecks, knots", but the focus here must be less on the bottlenecks and knots and more on the sense of individuation incited in "turning points". Singularities are not static qualities – we can only think of them in terms of a play of forces between things, and "relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected" (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 304; Bryant 2012). In returning to Spinoza's question "what can a body do?", the answer is that the capacity of a body can never be known, because the singularities that populate virtual and actual matter are not fixed – they are always becoming in relations of "speed and slowness" (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 299; Deleuze [1962] 1983, 39). In this example, then, bottleneck*ing* or knot*ting*, might be a more effective way of thinking – because it infers that singularities can necessarily only be alluded to through their relational engagement (Bryant 2012).

When I say that trauma is singular, I refer to both the sensation and experience of trauma, although the two are inextricable from each other. Trauma cannot be identified by looking and pointing and saying 'this or that is traumatic', because to do that would be to impose a fixed form from without. It would involve appealing to an outside idea of what constitutes the traumatic and pressing it upon the matter of the encounter. Instead, the traumatic experience unfolds – a hand touches skin, or words leave a mouth – and the singularities of the experience, strictly immanent *in* things (the hand, the words), can only be muddled through, or sensed, through engagement and interaction (Bryant 2012). Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2013, 320) write not to "look for a resemblance or analogy" because the trauma is always experienced through "molecular proximity"; it is more or less *this* or more or less *that*, moving through degrees of intensity and never staying still (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 295 and 320). The sensations that erupt – horror, or sadness – are not imitations; what is felt *is* horror or *is* sadness. They are not pickled feelings, preserved in a truth of what horror or sadness is said to feel *like*; the sensations are pure, non-referential, and always moving as temporary markers of collections of affects

that enter in to composition with the points of encounter – a continuous infinity of sensation. The traumatic experience, then, does not, and cannot, attain an ultimate form; it is located in a zone of proximity where it remains unforeseen and pre-existent (Deleuze 1997, 1).

Writing the singularity of trauma, then, necessitates an approach that avoids ordinary narrative techniques in which forms and subjects are imposed on to the writing in a hylemorphic manner (Smith 1997, xxxiii). This, for Deleuze (1997, 1), would not be literature: "there are very few who can call themselves writers". Although writing is always "inspired by the lived", it must go beyond the matter of liveable experience, and not posture a flat representation of a world that has already been decided (Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 172; Smith 1997, xv). Similar to Bacon's avoidance of painting the spectacle "before which one screams", writing the singularity of trauma does not begin with supposed ideas or storylines of what might be considered traumatic – it begins instead with the expression of the pure sensation of trauma (like the pure scream) (Deleuze [1981] 2016, 43). It is this that gives the writing its machinic function – it is productive, and active, and we can consider what *use* rather than meaning the text has. The writing-machine effects 'trauma' as an essential sign of absolute difference– essential not in the sense of *a priori*, but essential within the plane of immanence (Deleuze [1972] 2008, 10 and 27).

I need to be clearer here on exactly how my writing-machine, the one that effects the sign 'trauma', is productive and active. 'Trauma', written through the machine, does not come from a model or image, and it is in continuous flow (always more or less *this* or more or less *that*). When Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2013, 476) discuss the example of the wood artisan, they talk about the need of the artisan to "surrender" to the wood – to become sensitive to its signs – in order to avoid imposing form onto matter, following instead where the singularities of the wood leads (Deleuze [1972] 2008, 4). As the writer, I necessarily follow the flow of the sign of trauma, allowing it to move without imposing a fixed form. There is, however, a certain *formable* creative input – I develop characters and objects in my writing-machine (which I will detail later in this plateau) – but they can be thought of as temporary actualisations or forms through which to express the singularities of trauma ([1987] 2013, 477). Trauma's 'thisness' prevails, moving in and between the forms within the narrative, and my writing follows it. This is why Deleuze ([1972] 2008, 4) says that Proust's search is orientated to the future, and not the past, as is so commonly thought. The writing is based on an apprenticeship to signs (Deleuze [1972] 2008, 4). The encounter with the madeleine, for example, is not intended as an exercise in recognition or exposition of memory – but on an apprenticeship to its singular taste as a sign (Deleuze [1972] 2008, 4). My writing, then, too, is an apprenticeship to the sign of trauma.

The writing-machine is active – it moves and its signs flow. The sense in which it has a productive functioning refers closely to the affective force that the signs have upon the reader. Remember that Deleuze's employment of the term 'sign' is divorced from signification, and is connected instead with

force. The sign *is* affective force. It is, as Anne Sauvagnargues (2018, 35) has described, "the material of encounter and capture". In the introduction to Deleuze's *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, Daniel Smith (1997, xxii) writes that there is a "literary effect" produced by the writing-machine "as much as we can speak of an optical…or an electromagnetic effect". What Smith is describing here is how the writing-machine directly affects the reader without recourse to any symbolism. The intention here is not ignite a misty nostalgia – a sense of 'I know this…I knew this...this reminds me' – but to catch the reader out, not through being unkind, but in order to impact them directly with the force of a moment that is pure (Sauvagnargues 2018, 34). What is effected is pure thought, and the experience of pure sensation. What forces us to think in the writing-machine, Deleuze ([1972] 2008, 62) writes, is the sign, and the sign is non-referential – we "feel, think, and laugh" at the forces that compose life without being reminded of anything that has gone before (Sauvagnargues 2018, 36). This, then, is how the writing-machine functions – by effecting an encounter between the writer and reader. In my writing-machine, the zone between the writer and reader becomes one of experiencing and following the sign of trauma as singular, the transformative potential of which is to chip away at the shape of trauma, making room for the possibility of new and shifting understandings.

In the coming sections of this plateau I piece together an outline of *Harriet*, the narrative of my writing-machine. The affective force of my writing-machine is one that seeks to stay close to a Deleuzian immanent ethics. When I talk about 'unpacking' the shape of trauma by presenting trauma as singular, what I intend is to disrupt the moral judgements that fold into and support the stabilised social forms that represent trauma as otherwise. The articulating of what trauma *is* and how it *should* feel hinges, as I explored in the previous plateau, on the historical stock figure of the traumatised woman which snares individuals within the schizoid subjectivity of *parthenos*/aggressively sexual. The techniques that can be found in different spaces – from the benevolent, Oedipal-feminising speech of the therapist and family member, to the aggressive, truculent tactics of the barrister – are what carefully articulate the traumatised woman, and how she is expected to behave and respond. The shape of trauma, and the shape of the traumatised woman, here, are formed through judgements, and judgements are what "always bring[s] existence back to transcendent values" (Sauvagnargues 2018, 34). These shapes assume to state (in response to Spinoza's question) *precisely* what it is that a body can do, and, as such, possibilities for exploring capacities and becoming are immediately closed down (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 299). My writing-machine is about posturing an ethics of difference – one which disables transcendent shapes, and puts forward instead the functioning sign of trauma-as-singular.

The disabling of these shapes begins with extending my earlier conversation on shame and considering how shame responds to the question "what can a body do?" In the section that immediately follows, I will talk about how 'bad' feelings, and the shame of feeling those feelings, have generated my writing-machine. Shame is, as I have said previously, an affect of proximity. It produces heat through friction. Here, this hot space of writing is what enables the lifting of traumatic sensation from normative,

essentialising, and teleological tendencies, in order to explore it instead as pure, and non-referential. Shame, then, is critical to effecting the writing-machine as an encounter between writer and reader – it is what catalyses new thought.

Machinic Feelings, Machinic Shame

In the previous plateau I talked about the feelings I had about my trauma being encountered in both everyday life and therapy as bad, and I said that my sexual responses to my abuse were framed as pathological in order to preserve the historically articulated shape of the traumatised woman. To be clear here, however, I did not feel 'bad'. What I felt was arousal and curiosity, which can feel good – they wouldn't fall under what Sianne Ngai (2005) calls "ugly feelings", like anxiety, or irritation. My feelings, I feel, were possible openings for exploring the unevenness of traumatic experience. However, I am calling what I felt 'bad feelings' because the meaning of 'bad' was specified dependent on context. My feelings were bad because the conditions under which they emerged were considered inappropriate; they were identified as a blockage to moving forward towards a particular happiness. The judgements that are attached to the shape of both trauma and the traumatised woman are what informed this sense of 'badness', and the registers that expressed those judgements were all orientated toward the same idea of happiness. To 'heal' in the therapist's room, for example, necessitated inhabiting the mother-child figure in order to assume the essential feminine quality of vulnerability and to then, in turn, assume a sense of responsibility for the abuse. Through these registers, it seems, it was not seen as possible for me to reach happiness.

What my bad feelings did, I argue, was render visible the friability of these shapes; I disrupted the idea of trauma as self-evident, and of the traumatised woman as a natural figure. Perhaps, then, it would be more accurate in this case to describe my feelings as aberrant – they were feelings that didn't play by the rules; they were feelings that cropped up at the wrong time and in the wrong place. What I suggest here is that my aberrant-bad feelings were not blockages to my happiness – they were in fact movement. They disrupt the cultural praxis and conventions that stand as obstructions to becoming. They move to make room for possibility which, Ahmed (2010, 20) writes, often involves interrupting normative feelings. My bad feelings, then, can be thought of as affirmative. However, the interesting tension to note here is that I felt, and still feel, the shame of having felt feelings that were identified as bad even though I identified them as affirmative, and exploratory. I have said previously that shame is an affect of proximity – that it is about bodies being close to each other. Eve Sedgwick (2003) describes the shamed body as necessarily socially receptive; shame is, like all affects, based on relationality and transition. However, drawing on Silvan Tomkins, Sedgwick also states that shame – at the level of affect – is indistinguishable from shyness, and guilt (and Frank 1995, 133). The link between moral code and shame as an affect is problematic here because shame becomes hinged on the idea of a shared

understanding of wrongdoing. In this line of thought, to feel shame is to feel that you have done something bad, and that you have been seen by others (Ahmed 2004a, 103). Explained in a little more detail; the problem with attaching shame to a shared sense of wrongdoing is that, firstly, it necessitates the containing of 'wrong' within a concept of absolute truth and, secondly, shame becomes imbibed with particular meanings that communicate that truth. My shame was revealing of the social expectations and stigmas which drew together the different threads that articulate the shape of trauma, and the traumatised woman. The fact that I didn't fit into those shapes *meant* that my body was shameful, and that I *should* feel ashamed for having 'bad' feelings that stopped me from reaching the right kind of happiness.

What this model also suggests is that shame is an innate and intrinsic affect that comes from *within* in response to the 'truth' of good and bad. In order to move away from this it is necessary to detach shame from individual bodies (Ahmed 2004a, 102). My shame is not *mine*, although I might refer to it as such – it is not coming from *within* me. It is a relational affect that moves between and impresses upon bodies differently. The sense of exposure involved in shame is critical to understanding this: it does not have to be the case that I feel shame because others have caught me doing/feeling something that I feel is 'bad' (Sedgwick 2003). It comes down to how others witness my actions/feelings as bad, such that I feel shame (Ahmed 2004a, 103). I felt ashamed because I was seen to be feeling, and healing, the wrong way, even though I didn't feel it was wrong myself. I sensed shame because I was being shamed – I was exposed to others who were looking for the signs of shame (Ahmed 2004a, 119). Shame was transferred to me, and worked on and through me, but it did not *belong* to me.

At the core here is the need to detach the affect of shame from any idea of it having an absolute referent (Ahmed 2004a, 105), and to understand it instead as a relational affect that enters into compositions with bodies. It is necessary to understand that my shame is the affect of such an encounter, and is not a natural, innate response to having gone against the transcendent value of feeling and acting the 'right' way after trauma. To think of my feelings as morally bad would be to limit the exploration of their capacities. As an example, when Deleuze (1988, 22) writes about Spinoza's "devaluation of all values" he discusses the "ignorance" of Adam in perceiving the effect of poison by the apple as a consequence of the moral judgement of God, rather than as a consequence "of an encounter between two bodies whose characteristic relations are not compatible". What Adam mistakes, Deleuze (1988, 22) writes, is good and bad for Good and Evil. Good and bad exist for Spinoza, but they do not have a moral framing. Good and bad refer to whether or not a body, when "directly compound[ing] its relation with ours…with all or part of its power, increases ours" (Deleuze 1988, 21). Returning to my situation, we can ask: were the feelings I had about my trauma increasing or inhibiting my power to act? If these feelings remain framed as 'bad' within what Deleuze (1988, 23) refers to as "the system of judgement", then it will not be possible to answer the question. In the same way, if the shame that moves between my body and the

bodies of others remains perceived as recognisable evidence of the badness of my feelings, then it will not be possible to explore and effect the affective force of shame.

How best, then, to effect the affective force of shame? The writing-machine, as I explained earlier, is a site of affective encounter between the writer and the reader. If shame is an affect of proximity, then this makes it an effective starting point. It is the shame of having felt feelings that were identified as bad that catalyses the movement to "make room" for possibility, and the room that is made is the writing space – my writing-machine (Ahmed 2010, 20). What is exciting about the writing-machine is that it allows you to work with sensations in order to experiment with what they can *do* outside of whatever meanings might have previously been ascribed to them. When it comes to my bad feelings, and the shame of feeling those feelings, we return, again, to the shift from signification ('what does it mean?') to functioning ('what does it do?'). Bad feelings and shame are released from their generalised, universalised meaning and become singular. For example, in the writing-machine, my arousal is disconnected from any Oedipal themes or ideas of repression previously used to judge it; instead, it is – following Tomkins' wording on affect as non-referential and self-validating – arousing to be aroused ("It is enjoyable to enjoy. It is exciting to be excited" [Sedgwick and Frank 1995, 99]). Bad feelings and shame, then, become machinic – in the writing-machine they function independently from the judgements and meanings that are attached to the shape of trauma, and the shape of the traumatised woman. It becomes possible to put them to work so that they might enter into new relations in which traumatic sensation can be explored as pure.

The relations in this writing space are prickly hot – I arrive at my writing-machine with a shame that causes friction. I mentioned in the previous plateau that provoking ways of thinking trauma otherwise can poke at attachments and attunements that the reader might have about the world. There is a sense of disintegration, and dissolution here. What is being broken down is the shape of trauma, and what is being built is a response to a simple 'there is'. Bad feelings and shame are relieved from the containers of my *personal* experiences, and what is preserved is *impersonal* singular sensation. Returning to Deleuze's ideas of art as a motor of pure expression, in *What is Philosophy?* he writes with Guattari ([1994] 2015, 167) that the task of the artist is to preserve the very "being" of sensation, that is, they must extract sensations from the framings of lived experience and fashion them into a "monument". "Monument" as a term here is a little misleading, for it has nothing at all to do with commemoration; instead it refers to a "bloc" of present sensations "that owe their preservation only to themselves" (Deleuze and Guattari, [1994] 2015, 167). The bloc "stand[s] up on its own" in the same way that a monument does, but what differs is that it operates from a sort of ground zero (Johnson 2019, 57) – its action is not remembering, but *fabulation.* Following Bergson, Deleuzian fabulation is the invention with, and becoming of, preserved sensation (Bogue 2010, 14). Fabulation has a critical function in the writing-machine, but its purpose – unlike what we might assume of traditional storytelling – "is not to recount one's memories and travels…one's dreams and fantasies" (Deleuze 1997, 2). Remember that

reflection, for Deleuze, is the inhibiter of the possibility of pure thought. Fabulation is fabrication, and the artist does not reflect ("how could [they] recount what happened to [them]…since [they are] a shadow?, but is instead a "seer, a becomer" (Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 171). In my writing-machine, the fabulation that emerges is my narrative, *Harriet*. It is a story that – motored by the sensations from bad feelings and shame – explores the sign of trauma as singular without reference to a fixed sense of self (O'Sullivan 2017, 309). As I explained earlier, writing is always "inspired by the lived" – but it is not reducible to those experiences (Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 172). Recounting and reminiscing have little place in the writing-machine, for they involve a regurgitation – and therefore reaffirmation – of what is already believed to be known. If this project is intended as a disruption of what is already thought to be known about trauma, then the story that I tell must be the generation of something *new* (Bogue 2010, 17).

My narrative traces the early life of the central figure, Harriet, and the long shadow cast by the sexual violence pressed upon her by her older brother, Tommy. Harriet's stunted development – a consequence of both the incest and parental neglect, and which manifests primarily through delayed speech – positions her as something of an outcast at her school. Ostensibly alone, she nudges her way through her young years with difficulty. Harriet is what Deleuze and Guattari ([1994] 2015, 171) call a "giant" character – a larger-than-life hallucinatory vision (Bogue 2010, 19). Although in the beginning of the narrative she inhabits seeming taxonomies (female, young), she never represents a contained subject with which we might be able to identify. She does not cultivate the already-lived but instead casts a swollen projection of a life that is "too alive to be liv[e]able or lived" (Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 171-172; Bogue 2010, 18). The already-lived is too quiet; too small. It tucks away the stuff that we find to be excessive or nonsensical – the stuff that threatens to unravel the shapes we use to understand existence. The shape of trauma, for example, is smooth; we skate over its inconsistencies and unevenness in an attempt to fold it into something that *makes sense* in accordance with the dominant, authoritative strictures of identity. In the writing-machine, however, trauma is blown out of the proportions that have kept it contained within a shape – it passes into sensations, all of which must now stand up on their own (Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 174). What results is a disjointed assemblage that signifies 'trauma' as singular, and a body who responds to that sign. To the eye of the reader, Harriet moves awkwardly, and bizarrely, tripping her way through each moment; she is a traumatised figure but she persistently escapes being typified as such – she does not fit any shape. She does not *do* trauma 'correctly', much like, for example, Franz Kafka's *The* Great *Swimmer* who does not actually know how to swim (Deleuze and Guattari [1994] 2015, 172). This is what makes Harriet larger-than-life; in the narrative she encounters the most flagrant of abuse – incest and emotional manipulation – yet her responses bear no resemblance to normative ideas. She is sensitive to the sign of trauma because, in the writing-machine, she is freed from familial-Oedipal-feminine structures. She is horrified, but then she is excited; she is furious, but then she is complacent. It is not possible to typify

her as the traumatised woman. Because there is no fixed point of reference for her character (the existence of which might have her hurtling towards ruination), she is able to carve a passage through the narrative and bend it whichever way she likes. In the next substantial section I explore this further, and discuss Harriet's character as an always becoming-other (becoming-woman, becoming-monster), and how this enables her as a follower of the signs of trauma. Deleuze ([1968] 2014, 192) writes that "in order to truly begin thinking, we must first learn to forget what thinking is". The story must be arrived at without ears, eyes, or a mouth – the writing-machine provides new ones for new senses of perception, imagination, and feeling (Lambert 2012, 29). Without thought, then, we must follow where Harriet leads and, like the artisan following the signs of the wood, she follows the signs of trauma.

Following a Violent Life

Harriet is my effort to un-write the shape of trauma. Un-writing the shape of trauma involves forgetting its shape; this is what I mean when I iterate Deleuze's phrase that we must "learn to forget what thinking is". Loosening the grip of presuppositions in philosophy, or the Image of thought, is a central motive of the writing-machine (Johnson 2019, 58). Pure thought, as I discussed earlier, cannot come from an idea of what thinking looks like. Thinking trauma also, then, cannot come from an idea of what trauma looks like. As the writer, I must arrive at the composing of the narrative without thought – without an idea of 'trauma'. This is a seemingly large claim to make: how can it be possible to erase prior subjectivities and ideas in order to write from a blank slate? In a roundtable on Proust, Deleuze (2006, 30) describes the Proustian narrator as mad: "How is the narrator mad? He is a very bizarre narrator. Totally bizarre! He has no organs, he can't see, he does not understand anything". Madness here is about making present in the text a consciousness that cannot be described as the consciousness of the empirical self (Lambert 2012, 35). The empirical self is the problematic *cogito* whose thinking is determined by objective presuppositions (Lambert 2012, 38). The consciousness in the writing-machine, on the other hand, begins and exists only in the writing.

The answer, as the writer, is to become "mad" – displacing those presuppositions in order to explore other ways of being in the world (O'Sullivan 2017, 311). For my writing-machine, putting this into practice has started by disconnecting from traditional modes of narrating. Narrator types (third person, partial, omniscient) permit flexibility in that it becomes possible to explain events from different vantage points, but the problem remains that the narrator maintains a relation to the empirical self. The narrator already 'knows' their opinions, and perceptions, and this then becomes the lens through which to all-see, or part-see, the narrative. Contrastingly, in *Harriet* the narrator is not a 'who' so much as a fragmentary reporter of the impact of things as they happen. Drawing on the lack of organs, and the lack of seeing, Deleuze ([1972] 2008, 117) also likens the Proustian narrator to a spider – a body that casts a web and perceives things only through signals: "she answers only to signs" (Lambert 2012, 35).

The narrator of *Harriet* operates similarly, feeling their way through impressions without prior understanding, or knowing what they are looking for in advance. They move from encounter to encounter, following the signs of the text (which Deleuze describes as the "stirring" of the web which the spider blindly responds to, moving toward the caught prey but without prior knowledge of its essence) (Deleuze [1972] 2008, 117). It is the sensations of shame and bad feelings that have stirred the narrator of *Harriet* in the first instance, opening up the web-space of the writing-machine but, moving on from this, it is the signs of trauma that they follow. The intelligence, or 'truth' of trauma, can only be gathered through this following, for it cannot come before – it does not come from memory, or a pre-existing idea; it is produced only through encounters with signs.

In terms of the writing technique employed in my writing-machine, intelligence about trauma is developed via the narrator moving between positions in order to tell the story. But it is not enough to think here 'ok, so now the narrator is Harriet; now the narrator is Tommy; now the narrator is speaking in the third person', even if 'I' or 'he' or 'she' is used. The narrator never fully occupies a vantage point because not one of those positions exist as a definite form. "Who is this "I" doing the describing?", Gregg Lambert (2012, 36) writes in his Deleuzian commentary, responding to the "floating" narrator in the bedroom of Kafka's Gregor Samsa. I have found a similar style of narrating in Eimear McBride's 2014 novel *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. In the story, it is the unnamed "half-formed" girl who appears to be the narrator, but the character frequently slips and is crossed by other voices. The narrator (he/she/they/it) floats, gathering a wide scope of events through fumbling approximations, marked by the Joycean and Beckettian tic of McBride's prose. It is never *really* clear who or what is speaking. Like the unnamed figures in McBride's narrative, and like Gregor, in *Harriet*, the narrator also floats – they are not a figure who knows and never doubts; they leave behind the prior experiences that might have ordinarily been used to interpret, and approach the narrative quite literally. Disconnected from a simple empirical self, the narrator spreads – like the spider's web – into the corners of the narrative as a sort of inquisitive transmitter through which the different figures are able to speak. Harriet, Tommy, the school, the house – whose experiences are constituted by their interaction with signs – become the ones to develop and speak a fragmented truth about trauma.

Like the narrator, the body of Harriet is not presupposed by an empirical self. In the world of lived experience, Harriet would be oppressed by her own major form (Lambert 2012, 78). The experiences of her abuse, and her responses to that abuse, would be funnelled through familiar frames. Figured as feminised, Harriet would assume responsibility for her abuse through her vulnerability. She would be marked with the labels of 'untameable' or 'unstable' woman. She would be read as nothing other than an imitation of 'woman', and it would be through such frames that we would come to 'know' the shape of trauma as a result of gendered violence. Harriet would be thought of as *like* a woman in this way, or *like* a woman in that way. In the writing-machine, however, the word 'like' is removed (art is not *like* anything). 'Like' is a metaphor, and its only possible action is to frame encounters and objects within

resemblances (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 320). The presentation of Harriet is as a character – not a character that is *like* other Harriets, but as immanent only to herself. This does not, however, mean that she is a discrete subject, because to determine her as such would be to flatten the machinic process. In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze ([1972] 2008, 113) writes that "the logos is a huge Animal whose parts unite in a whole and are unified under a principle or leading idea". The logos falls away in my writing-machine; Harriet is not the 'traumatised woman', and the spaces in which she moves throughout the narrative are not reflective of what we might recognise as *like* the family-space, or the school-space, or any other logical thread that might lead toward an Oedipal understanding of Harriet and the events of the story. There is no whole in the narrative to be found; what we find instead is that the body of Harriet, and the bodies that surround her, are comprised of what Deleuze ([1972] 2008, 97) calls "partial objects" – fragments that connect together but without becoming a unified image.

Partial objects stop the train of associations so that we can follow connections instead point by point ("and…" "and then…") (Deleuze and Guattari [1983] 2008, 5). They are "fragments without totality…partitioned scenes" (Deleuze [1972] 2008, 97). In the story of *Harriet*, for example, we see a scene – a bedroom, the figure of a brother, a flow of blood, but it is blurry; it is difficult to make out because the objects of the scene communicate only indirectly (Deleuze [1972] 2008, 113; Lambert 2012, 29). It is a scene that should 'add up' to something, but it doesn't. Or, it *does* add up, but what it adds up to is a fragmented whole that is produced alongside parts that nevertheless remain non-totalisable (Lambert 2012, 85). It is a scene of sexual violence – that is the whole, of sorts. It is possible to feel twinges of familiarity with that whole, however, the familiar here becomes strange. It is a scene of sexual violence that cannot be captured using symbolic narratives because what unfolds on the page is a series of partial objects that are stumbled upon blindly by both the narrator and the reader. The scene cannot attain an ultimate form. It might help to refer again to my earlier discussion of Bacon's paintings – what is being avoided when 'painting' the scene of sexual violence is the spectacle of presupposed ideas (trauma of separation from the mother; expression of castration anxiety). Detached from these symbolic explanations, what can be perceived instead is the connecting of partial objects – a mouth, an arm, a gasp, a bedspread, a flow of sperm – that signal the trauma of the encounter. What this does is amplify the singularities of the partial objects, and it leaves Harriet free to roam through and follow the objects as signs, responding to them literally as she encounters them (it is arousing to be aroused; it is frightening to be frightened).

I mentioned earlier that the signs of the writing-machine flow, and we can return to this idea in light of the discussion of partial objects. Nothing in the writing-machine stays still, in part because the singularities that populate the virtual and actual matter of the narrative are never comprised of static qualities. Harriet, too, does not stay still. Because she is de-anchored from the starting point of a 'given' identity, she is able to follow the flow of signs without restriction. This is what opens up the capacity of the writing-machine – it does not hinge on analogically figurative stuff (Sauvagnargues 2018, 152).

When I talk about movement in the writing-machine, what I refer to is the following of objects in the narrative, and the new encounters that are arranged with them (Sauvagnargues 2018, 153). But, as Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2013, 450) write, "Following is not at all the same thing as reproducing". What they mean to say here is that, in art, we do not follow a figure – chasing an already decided image of that figure – in order to reproduce that image in each moment. This would be nothing more than analogical mimesis (Sauvagnargues 2018, 152). In *Harriet*, that would involve knowing ahead of reading *what* she is going to do and *how* she is going to look. Instead, we follow the narrative, as Harriet follows the signs. What takes place is a search for singularities, not a search for the "discovery of a form" (Sauvagnargues 2018, 151); it is about looking forwards, not backwards in order to reproduce what has been thought before. Harriet, then, can be said to be becoming – becoming something else, something new in each moment. She is engaged in compositions of pure sensations, not correspondence with metaphor or allegory (Sauvagnargues 2018, 150). It is this that works to transform her.

Harriet's transformation occurs throughout the narrative. She arrives in the story at two points; we first meet her as a baby, and then as a young adult – twenty – when she is building a life alone in Hackney, and we – the assemblage of writer, floating narrator, and reader – engage with her as such, for a short time at least. Harriet ages, and the story matures, but it is not her ageing that constitutes her transformation. She moves through a sequence of states but does not become confined by any one of them, since this would stop the flow, like "drying up a spring" (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 321). As she encounters moments of violence but also pleasure, she becomes increasingly less recognisable as a subject with which we might feel 'twinges of familiarity'. In the same way that trauma is not a unit of realness or facts, neither is Harriet, and neither are her responses to her experiences. In the world of lived experience, what we expect – or what we choose to see – is that individuals will occupy certain positions or "molar entities", and that these entities will correspond with and be made more concrete by their behaviours (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 321). A child will misbehave, for example, or a dog will want to play. The more a child misbehaves, the more child-like they become. The more a dog plays, the more dog-like they seem. Something similar occurs when an individual displays what we perceive to be character-defining behaviour; someone is unfaithful to their partner, and we imagine that they will reproduce themselves as unfaithful in their behaviour always ('once a cheater, always a cheater'). The lines of the molar entity become harder, and thicker ('you are a cheater, and you are untrustworthy'). However, in the case of Harriet, the opposite happens. It is not possible, despite the abuse that is inflicted on her, to identify her more and more concretely as a woman traumatised. Instead, she dissolves the lines of the molar subjectivity that we might recognise from "the outside" (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 320). She moves outwards and expands – this is her becoming. When Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2013, 321) talk about becoming, they describe it as a molecular process, which is to say that – in the context of the writing-machine – a figure must not imitate or reproduce a form but instead "emit[ting] particles" that enter into relations with other particles (signs and sensations). Their

well-known example of the wasp and the orchid makes this clearer; the becoming-orchid of the wasp, and the becoming-wasp of the orchid refers to the loss of the wasp and orchid's proper value in relation to the latter (Lambert 2012, 44). In joining together to form the reproductive mechanism of the orchid, they are no longer recognisable as a self or an individual, but a marginalised fragment – an expression of the impersonal (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 8; Sauvagnargues 2018, 7; Lambert 2012, 43). It is the same for Harriet; her woman-form expands into a molecular becoming through her engagement with the sensations and sign of trauma, which she responds to free of pre-existent signifiers. Remember that, in the writing-machine, the traumatic experience unfolds through connecting partial objects that signal trauma (a hand touches skin; words leave a mouth), and Harriet responds only to what constitutes her immanent environment. She screams, but it is a pure scream. In entering into relations with the sensation of a scream, she is, then, becoming-scream. It is important to note that what becoming describes is a zone of proximity – the space *between* – shapes or states, and that it is always shifting. In this example, Harriet is neither the scream nor a woman, but both in transition.

This is what I mean when I say that Harriet is a hallucinatory vision. As she follows the sign of trauma, it eats away at her, or rather, the idea of her as a molar entity. By the end of the story, it is not easy to locate Harriet as a character. It becomes more difficult to link her to a determinable subject (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013). She decomposes into parts and enters into composition with others, yet the disassembled-reassembled parts don't ever 'add up' to a total picture because they remain in an indiscernible zone of shifting – of becoming. She is teeth, and also nails, but she is also the chair on which she sits, and the ceiling to which she rises. Her face is her father's grief. Her hair is her fury for her brother. She is not a ghost but a collection of forces that ripple through the narrative. Like the Proustian spider-narrator, she becomes indeterminable; a monstrous becoming of partial objects. I have said before that Harriet is monstrous not because she takes on bestial characteristics, but because of the way she shifts in response to her encounters. The more she refuses to *do* trauma correctly by not submitting to the vulnerable, feminised form, the more monstrous she becomes. She is larger-than-life, swelling as she inhabits all points of the story. This is how Harriet generates a line of flight from the shape of trauma. She exceeds any conditions that might seek to determine her, presenting as a continuous consuming and shifting process with no describable or anticipatable end point (Sauvagnargues 2018, 99). She becomes steadily imperceptible – becoming-woman, becoming-monster, becoming-woman-monster, dissolving into pure sensation – colours, silhouettes, shadows, lines, until she is not extinguished but, on the contrary, inextinguishable in her enormity as an anorganic, asignifying, and asubjective field of forces (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 325).

A Note on Writing Style

In anticipation of the switch of registers to *Harriet*, I provide here some thoughts on the writing technique that I have used to write the narrative. As I discussed in the prologue, I draw stylistic influences from writers such as Eimear McBride, however these choices were not made arbitrarily – because I just 'fancied' them – and so, reflecting on the writing of this particular plateau, there remains something to be said specifically about the way in which the words of *Harriet* arrive on the page. I write this explanation with some irony, actually, because it could be argued that pre-figuring *Harriet* in this way detracts from the capacity of the narrative to 'do the talking', as it were. However, the intention of this plateau has been to set up the narrative as an empirical object by analysing its structure and theoretical underpinnings, and so this last short section can be thought of as a segue to ease what might otherwise be felt as a sudden rupture between styles.

The most important thing to be said about *Harriet* is that I intended for the tone to feel flat and uncompromised – it is written as declarative, direct, and matter-of-fact. What I aim to transmit is a sense of both urgency and dwindling in order to express violence as something happening with an immediate presence, either slowly or at a fast pace, but definitely in the here and now. This is true even of the parts of the story that refer to Harriet's past, or to her memories of the past in the present. The past and the present are flattened into one plane stylistically so as to give all sections of the writing equal emphasis and importance. That is not to say that there is no distinction between past and present, but I have not spent time demarcating their differences using drawn out descriptions in order to position the 'past' as something far away, shadowy, or elliptical, or the 'present' as closer, saturated, and lucid. For example, Harriet's dream of her abusive brother in Part I emerges and mixes at the same time as an intimate encounter with her lover. It is not easy to distinguish between the two at first, but they are both equally impactful upon her experience in the very same moment.

Politically, writing in this 'flat' way can be thought of as a feminist imperative to express sexual violence as neither mysterious nor peculiar – it is not hiding anywhere, even if there are efforts taking place within many different registers to cover its presence up. Violence mingles with everyday interactions as ordinarily as anything else. Presenting this through the writing, then, might be described as a "minorising" via the manipulation of language – the words make visible what different configurations and framings could otherwise keep hidden (Bogue 2003, 6). Such manipulation in the way I present it has a name, or a few names: paratactic, hypotactic, and can be more informally described as staccato or truncated. In writing, parataxis – "to place side by side" – is often defined as written sentences placed together without unifying conjunctions (Perelman 1993, 313). This stands in contrast, although is not dissimilar to, hypotaxis – in which clauses are subordinated, often continuously, to each other (Jucker 1991, 204). Kathy Acker ([1973] 1992, 127) can be read as sharply

paratactic with her prose: “Children are monsters prefer to be alone. The women who have them are stupid. I remember the schoolyard, the yard around the house, as if it were yesterday”. Similarly, Beryl Fletcher (1996, 84) – particularly in *The Silicon Tongue* – moves between paratactic and hypotactic: “Although he was small he was very strong. He pulled my panties down and raped me. I was terrified and in agony”. What both authors present are sentences that are punchy and short, with the effect being a sense of presence and immediacy that I have tried to capture in my writing.

Para and hypotaxis arise from and are subject to a slew of semantic analysis often framed by the poet Ron Silliman’s conversation on what he calls “the new sentence”, which describes the minimising of syllogism within a sentence by altering the structure and placement of its parts (Perelman 1993, 313). In *Harriet* the writing is frequently, if not always, para or hypotactic: “His that Daddy mouth opens now and reeks this foul. Not listening. Silent now, tongue stuck to that tin. Will his mouth to open open open but, comfort stays quietly in the corner.” Referring to Silliman’s discussion, what happens here is that the scrambling of words and word order enable different meaning via contiguity (Perelman 1993, 315). In his essay, Silliman (1987, 70) refers to Wittgenstein for an example in which words don’t relate to each other by ‘normal’ continuity but instead operate by a complex system of polysemy: “…the order ‘Bring me sugar’ and ‘Bring me milk’ make sense, but not the combination ‘Milk me sugar’, [however] that does not mean that the utterance of this combination has no effect”. The key point to remember is that “Milk me sugar” has an *effect*, and generates *affect*. Drawing on this, what I attempt in *Harriet* is to write things almost as I might hear them in conversation, so that the words are not eliminating of atmospheric noise – such as a car going past, or a crash downstairs. What this does is reflect in the sentences the more disordered syntactical and grammatical structure of thought, hearing, and speech: “Get detail. It er, it moves around each month. Butter knife clink Grab Your Coat? Yeah that’s it. Disparaging huff You’ll end up with your skirt up ’round your neck if you aren’t careful”.

A paratactic style of writing also facilitates the generation of what I described earlier as the ‘floating narrator’ in *Harriet*. A significant influence here is the prose of Samuel Beckett’s 1972 spoken monologue *Not I*, which invokes a sense of profound subjective dislocation because Mouth, the disembodied speaker, cannot connect to the pronoun “I” that is ‘appropriately’ theirs: “what?...who?...no!...she!” (Brater 1974, 190). The prose in *Not I* rattles intentionally at speed which has been described by Brater (1974, 193) as Mouth’s running away from its coexistence with the authentic first-person singular. Drawing on this, even though *Harriet* reads for the most part fairly slowly, I wrote it all down quite quickly (“before the idea gets away from you”) in order to enable a flow of words that, like Mouth, do not belong to anyone, but are a practicing of language for the sake of direct and immediate effect (Pollock 1998, 75; Hayles 1990, 396). This, I think, is what adds to *Harriet’s* ‘flatness’, which is not the same as saying that the narrative is boring or without vibrancy – what it means is that the words are completely moveable, depthless, and without attachment to

underlying meaning or symbolism. Where *Harriet* begins now, as we move on to the narrative, is in her past – a flat, immediate past.

Harriet: Part I

Growing Pains

1987

Cast back. Cast back now to You, Madeleine, pregnant and buoyant. Me, dedicated. Get it right this time. Tommy six, causes trouble. Feet up darling I can bring it for you. Maddie, this time will be different. Not listening. You're speaking but not to me saying down at your clothes birth is such an ugly word. B-urth. How do you know it'll be different irritated when we don't even know what we did wrong in the first place. Poke this alien you say kicking inside of me. Bloated bitch. We don't know. We don't know. Hearing the morning drizzle you hiss the devil must be inside of him. I grew Tommy I love him but the devil must be inside. Why would you say that? He's not that. He could be. Quite the tongue on you today. Changing subject. Here, books on breastfeeding, co-sleeping. Set them plonk on the table. Important connection doc' said. Connection. Tommy is going to have a sister or a brother. You're saying I don't want to read these. Hmm, what? Christ's sake James. Too much information right now I don't want to read these. Mutter it quietly to save me hearing. Clattering 'round now, what you always do when you think you can't. Ok, ok. You soften. I'll take them, thanks, I'll take them, yes.

Watch you later try to sleep. Think on what you said. Young and misty-eyed oversharing on the first date I remember. I say this limply. Reminiscing and nostalgia not useful frames for problems, but. It's comforting to sit with and imagine, let them go round and round in my. Speak thoughts out loud now. It changed but I'm not sure when. You were. My Madeleine and then my. My manic. They called you so, I heard it. Your workplace all teeth chattering this and that. She's manic. Squealing cats how can they speak such an oracle truth but it's. It's true. Your white hot spreads on me and now on Tommy so. I swear to God this didn't come from me. Twitch of anger for he or for me, or us, not really sure but such a little. Such a little look what he's done. Done to my Madeleine. Your doe skin sweats with a shiver in your sleep. Unnamed sickness slipping candlewax down your face. Never want no never would have wanted don't know where he's got it from. You. Your father perhaps, he always had a weird way. He'll grow out of it, we said, just needs the right care. At first your heels clicked in agreement. Sprightly. We're good people. It's difficult to see it in your own, I suppose. Turning eyes to wallpaper, wallpaper-eyes don't see. And to others, there's a. Normal. Terrifyingly normal. Polite boy so helpful. Sang to his Grandma that one time. Brings the newspapers when we stay. Says I love you and please and thankyou and goodnight. But then. Tantrum that. On in the. Supermarket when he scratched. Yes it's worse. It's worse now than it was before. Spreading he's snatching, scratching, all tongue and mouth that soft face contorts with teeth spitting fuck offfff how'd he even learn that yet. Was it your uncle? He swears a lot.

I swear to God this didn't come from me. Thinking back now the family tree is all stable all good all happy. I think. Sometimes I want to hold him to. But sometimes. How to explain a child with a taste for violence.

Winter wears on, cold. Sinking your battleship you slip. Oh God with wringing hands I can see that you are I know that you are. Trying but it's mayhem today. A lot of plates to be spinning and sometimes I just need. I just need to see your smile. Telephone rings says Tommy in an incident at school. Won't do at all pencils sharp too sharp. Another child sat right plop down on the lead yes that's it. Deliberate because he giggled. We know it. Please come immediately. Arrive with a heaving breath and dust-grey carpet scratching under my feet. It's challenging behaviour teacher says all twirling skirts and report cards spread. I can see here been many um many incidents. Everything alright at home? Pregnant again what fantastic news. But still. Third trimester depression perhaps? It's not common but its normal. Whatever that means. I'm sorry to hear that. But still. He's only six but he's causing trouble. Afraid he has to be at home for the time being. Please take him home we'll discuss further soon.

Both here now tick-tocking slips idly by. He in bedroom quiet she in kitchen peeling white paint picking. Absently. And there's not a sound for a while. News spreads in a small village. Villagers bind together when times are hard. Come and go bustling in with lasagnes and supplies. We thought Tommy could use this, it's a toy for fidget relief. Explain to cursory wafting hands he's off school for a while. Anxiety about the new baby perhaps? It's been going on for a while. Oh. There's been some happenings. Oh, I see that's troubling to hear, do you think he's? Do you think he's? Whispers. A little different? Hackles pricked I wish they'd go away. No sort of diagnosis yet. We'll see. Another appointment next week. They say they know some excellent facilities for Boys Like That and do you think that might help? Interfering bitch. Bad to think I know. And Madeleine, does she? Is she? Is she well. My voice drowned out by what they don't know for all their talk and insisting. Signed off from work. Just struggling a little I think. No, no not at all. Just. Always been sensitive. Life's curveballs and all that. I drift.

And when the contractions finally came they were thick and fast. In the dark. It's late. Bundle Tommy with the neighbour and slam car into gear. Speeding the roads to hospital you lean on my arm pleading begging I can't do this help me. Carry you to the ward screaming cut me like a fish and pull it out I won't push I won't do that again don't make me. The anaesthetist is bitten and oh god what are you doing what the fuck are you doing sink teeth nails sharp. The arms of the midwife wrap tight around your arms heave you onto the bed. Twisting limbs writhing and kicking, get it out of ME get it out of ME. Ten centimetres time to push already that's quick. Your hand on mine you peel skin off and banshee howl snorting snot and shit and blood. Squeals push it through slowly at first breathe in time you must. Breathe. You with bared teeth all snarling I cannot do this but crowning now. Baby's head poking through gunk and slime halo and my laughter weak with relief you're doing it. Mads, you're doing it. Toothpaste tube body squeezes it out flat and limp. God is that really mine little gargoyle child

gargling mucus gives way to fresh screams. My ears pierced with shrilling shrieks it's a girl. It's a girl. Swaddle her up my darling angel bursting heart she's so. You gravel-gasping and gulping staring vacantly any which way but at this precious thing. Do you want to hold her? Do you want to hold her? Madeleine. Your daughter. Gesturing blithely you're mouthing no I can't. Not right now.

In my arms instead she sits shaking then still. This small wrinkled bag, skin of. An awkward peace takes the air as she at me all sunrise eyes looks with a gaze that quiets the room. Looking at you I'd never know the end has begun. I didn't know but the end had begun. Something in your breath names Harriet and this we say is Harriet we say.

1999

In the daytime. At the school. Growing pains groan like. A gaggle of girls in the toilet collect their gossip. Like piss in a bowl. No you didn't. No you never. Pig-liar. Did to. Did you hear. I didn't hear. Mrs Filch says he's gotta have detention now, all week. Ahhhhhhh in unison. And then Harriet. Harriet they say. A weird one. Eleven o'clock usually the time this conversation crops up. Not seen her for a week and what's that about. She does that sometimes. And then when she comes back she's. She's what? Well go on then. I dunno she's just, different. Face looks thin and bruises on her wrists. It's always him that brings her back to school innit. Who? Her brother. I heard. What? I heard. She lets him cram his fingers up her fuck she lets him. You can't say that. Not a mother but a brother fucker haha. You can't say that. Probably doing him a favour. Eighteen and hasn't gone to college university sits at home fuck all from what I hear. Useless. Waaaaa-hankerrrr chuckle. You can't say that girl leaves turns on her heel, you can't say that all the way out the bathroom door. Poor Harriet she huffs there's something wrong and you lot aren't fair. Awwww poooor Harriet they sing-song whining giggling. Slam door. One down. Reconvene. Heads huddle tongues wriggle. I 'erd their mam were a witch says one. They drowned her giggle to see if she'd float ha. Died in childbirth didn't she? Nar she popped up in that lake remember. You know the one. Full of fag butts and plastic bags. Where the year elevens go on Fridays, down past the village. Well I heard she was mad locked 'em up in the basement kept 'em there then topped 'erself. Is that why she. She Harriet she. Speaks like she's deaf! They hyena shriek. Never learned proper no. She's all tttthhh and mmmnnn. And then and then. Remember when she started her period in maths stuck her hands in her knickers went eeeeeeee and wiped it on the wall. Mr Wyatt nearly had a heart attack. And then and then. That time that year nine kid shoved a urinal cake in her gob hahaha. Oh that was so. Fuck that was so. All keeps going twittering and then and then and then. And then she. And then she. Well. It's 'er fault anyway so fackin' weird. Harriet and her tatty skirts. Harriet and her bruised hands. Harriet the outcast.

Sssh! Ssh zip it hush! Whas'sat? Scuffle huddle squeezing faces up to bathroom window to peek see the creak school gate yawn open. Ouch don't stand on my fucking. Give me a leg up. I see them watch

them here they come look watch here they come. Craning to get a better look eyeballs up from grimy basement gossip-hole level with the pavement now. Through the nettles. Here they come with white paper skin. In the autumn wind them here they come Harriet and Tommy. Bundled in wax jackets matching with caps. He with his arm around she empty staring. Step in time their ankles pass one-two. She looks so. One-two. I guess she's back. One-two. Wonder what it's been this time.

2003

Stay calm tonight and remind myself that they can't see what I have seen. I see face this face a wall that keep me behind a me that they cannot see. I hide in like a pocket and pull out a few an eye here there or two and present! This careful confidence in front of my mirror tonight. And now. I speak now. Speak with a woman voice. And now at sixteen I am a woman and I can tell you that. A woman of sixteen knows much about the world. A strange water and strange sunlight you grew me strong a Harriet resistant to the wind. You grew me. Up in my. Up in my and it's a long way from the days when you would wait outside my bedroom tap tap on the door and What's the time Mr Wolf? say to get your foot in. And Daddy don't know didn't never knew. What Daddy don't know can't. And tonight. Daddy don't know. That I am going out leaping. Onto my own stage my own tongue and hands to make a story fired up with what you fired up in my. Scarleted lips and a dress hoiked right up there. What I have to say is that. I am going to up and away from here tonight. Be better than this that the faces at school crowding me out. I am an accelerated woman. I am sped up my growing is done I growed I grew quick. Bigger than this that the faces at school.

I know me now and say that I am a world. Stretch me open for I am a world of pearls. It's a London girl for me to be now. Landahn. With all the bricks and the mortar and the fack off's and the alright darlin's and the cigarettes floating down the Nile gutters. See the world. The millennium new. Now. To London I. All this bit champing but now. Prospects I. An' yes. I gather my mirror confidence, my stuff, and my clutter. Not much. Two bags and a tenner from the sock drawer for credit fuck I phone ok. Clock ticks the bus waits and I must clip chip clip chip go now. Tip-toe past your door now. Goodbye. My brother my second skin. Goodbye. Trace a finger over the notch on your door. Soft on me like a pair of jeans your discipline. Hard, when you would. Brain clicks forward images of you. Snap. Shot. Of your hands and me. On your hands I learned. Love. But in your soft breath of sleep you don't know. That I am stealing away. From your love hands. And suddenly I with hesitation wash and feel. Scared. Can I leave? Really. Would break your heart. To find my sheets empty and wafting with the smell of gone. So I stand there numbing in the hallway and blinking at the dark. I could be dead or swept away or taken by another. But Dad he wouldn't. Notice I s'pose. Maybe be grateful. Desperately tried to keep things together but not much warmth coming from that direction. No, I must leave. No more awkward dinners his beer warbling belly-aching worrying. Worrying about him not me. Saying I can't do this your mother would have this that done that. It's not that I haven't tried Harriet it's just. Your brother,

he. And watch his energy slip as he shudders from my gaze again. And your foot under the table is twitch-twitch because you know. That it's not about trying. It's about he's sick of the ghost of me my Ophelia mother, drifting around with same hair same eyes. Takes its toll. Those reminders those. And so it's up to me to lift the weight. I'm doing you a favour, my brother. Really. I'm cleansing Dad of his nail-biting fear of the past. You hold on to him now, he'll need someone. Just not me.

And I trample down the street now, with a renewed energy. Clip. To the number 43. Chip. To the cold light of Hackney.

2007: Sunday

City lights. City slights.

And I flash now. Flash back.

Open and howl.

And this, I return. Fuck. And return.

Wake with bleary eye. Roving over wallpaper. Home. Home is mascara stained pillow and aloe vera withering on the sill. A dead arm, under me a lump. Taste of fag and that. Chemical drip-drip in throat. Square head lolls up to sitting. And the room turns from upside down to right side up. Sting and itch from not sure what. Out in the corridor stumble I say. Cher'. Cheryl. Knock. Can I. I need a fu'. I need a slash please Cher'. She I'm in the fuckin' shower mumbles, and I trundle in to mint and lime fog and steaming glass. You'd do well to fuckin' sort yourself out before you wake up in a coffin. Her anger sneers through the curtain. You need to fuckin' ease off the mandy it's screwin' with you and you can't afford it anyway. My head guilt knocking at the corners nodding ok. Yes ah ok and pissing out last night's vodka. And peel my bare arse to find that familiar red trickle creep its way out the bowl and whoops onto the floor. Christ Harriet, she pokes her head. Get it together.

Fresh. A day. Film from my teeth scrubbed and clean clothes. Sort myself out for what? I'm ok. I say into my tea. Aaaahh. But. Unkind intrusion. Between now and then the night is quiet. A blank quiet. What did I do? What did I do say as she barges around the kitchen with bottles and plastic cups. I can't remember. Oh, nothing new. Or something new. I don't know. No, not really. Nothing new. Just those things that you talk about. It's weird. People who – your brother? I thought he was dead? He is. She at me catches my wavering gaze as if she'd pluck the lie from my tongue there and then. But you speak. Like he's here. Gloss this over I'm off my head what do you expect? A lucid account of some…art books politics what. Good gawwd it's sing-song a frightful government this one haha. Cut me off Why you have to be such a dick? Always joking. Four years been here and I don't really know you. Save for

when you're fucked and you start warbling about imaginary or dead people. C'mon Cher' giggle don't be like that. I'm just a. I'm sorry. Offer Have a lager with me. No, and she slams out to work.

Oi 'arriet you were chattin' some shite last night eh! A park bench shouts. Yer. I mumble. Trip-traipsing through the crushed leaves. October smell and rain. This me moving through same paths streets past down the Downs. Moving through the city that is my own. Through the sirens and the shouts, a life I told I knew the way. Once. This is the way. And now. The way is down. Past. Warehouses on Saturday nights silent disco 'til coppers come piggy us out. Past. The small shop stop filters and credit. Past. The daily tramp heave-hoed out the noisy local to my left. Past. London Fields whispering its quiet to my right. Stand. And huffff into the late afternoon, the air freshly licking my face lift this murky head as I trail down through a Hackney that spreads just for me, the lights curling away to a distant Shoreditch. Late. The dusk chases snap at my heels. Alright alright urge my forward tread through a closing Sunday crowd eating smoking Can I. Do you. Nar y'alright. Oi. And a sigh. And then a pause. As I stop and breath-catch watch the sun farewell the day. The darkness eats the chimneys. Helps itself to windows walls people paths. Estranged shadows meet and swoop the sky switches to blackened brick but stops. Here. At the door of the Dolphin.

Fall through to the glittering warmth and That's the third time this week, Harriet. Yeah. I know. Poor effort you need to be more. Yeah. Punctual. I know, and quick assess the evening mood. London doesn't care that it's Sunday. The carpet teems with feet from Central. Well-heeled feet. Feet that walk the walk and come in with business cards and swelling wallets that love it here So cheap and So kitsch. Here they come to hide until the dawn. In plain sight now though, for that smoking ban. Looked better behind fumes of silver. The thick choke of nicotine is now sweat and belch. The clear stench of rich. Crane through that stench-crowd now and stomp barge to the bar 'scuse whoops thank you. Through the lapels. Escape with record only one fanny grab. Quick hair up in the tarnished mirror turn around What can I get you? Pint o'that Krony a Mancunian drawl request. Nose in my earhole. The thud-thud of. Ten heads deep in a queue and filter through quick as I can. Fuckin' chin-chin boys a group of eight lollop with hands slopping stick on the bar. Crash the drip tray and shout me hoarse. How many fucking hands d'yer think I. Wait. Just wait, please say I What's that again? Spy Cheryl through an elbow shoulder gap with that lad she met last. Flick back Eh? No Cointreau, sorry. Me sliding on spilt lager down to the Can I get some help here? With this burgeon of slurring mouths.

Wading through the hours on my own in a crowd whose contemplating eyes survey breasts to ankles. Routine. My name is Nice Tits and Darlin' and I dance through the circle of cascading arms dodging fingers and tongues that loosen as it latens. Get to fuck you smarmy cunt. Full of it. Always is. Have a drink that Mancunian says. Have another. Oh I shouldn't. Have another. Ok. Less cuntish after a. Few shots. Enough to take the edge. And he saunters off to the loud muffle of the karaoke mic. No one'll notice anyway. Now clamouring bodies for a go on the stage. All the world is. Until Monday morning

at least. The night warms and that vodka spark lights me up as I listen to the warbling screeching, it's a real let-go they say. Drift eyes over the crowd through heads and necks to the student pocket that's squashed in the corner. Girls shrilling clicking squeaking. Itching tights and straps rearrange. Flicker between the arms of the boys. Boys that languish cool boredom. They mix. A smooth mix. A cuddle of limbs. A plait of hands creeping up and through. With. They are. Eels draped. And the longer I stare I. Am captured. They move. With soft yearning. Over each other, and there. Is he. A he. A face that I've seen. Maybe before, but suddenly now it's. Etched. He is. There. A face, folded in to the yawning mouth of an armchair with girls. Slithering around. Haloed by the green glory of the exit light.

And tonight I must shine bright like a diamond because he looks. My glinting gives me away and he looks. Across all of this busy space he looks. Tugs at my in a way I've not. Back. Forth. And back again. Still there. A stare that steals through me and tap-taps at my bones.

I am inside this moment until he in front of me appears. A ghost. A leaf. I float.

Not singing? No, I can't. That's the point. I think, anyway. Yes I suppose. Brief cast back to the slither-girls. You worked here long? casually A few years. Fingers through the thick wire of his hair. Not a London girl are you though. That's not true I cockney pretend. He testing testing asks me questions. Quick. A life. I could be…Surrey? Anywhere. Let me guess let me guess he glees. Brighton? Close, let him have it. The nice bit. You look posh. Thanks. What's it to you anyway? Ha. You always this rude? Quiet. Ok, sorry, what do you do? I'm studying. At Saint Martins. What's that? You don't know it? It's um it's an art school. Holborn way. Look down to the caramel pale of his palm and the ebony of his knuckles at a skilled napkin-folding It's a swan! he twinkle says with the brights of his eyes. Mr Saint Martins. Doesn't sound so bad. Boys into sculpture don't go down so well in Brixton he chuckles. I see say I fingering the soft creases of the swan. There's a pause. Quick, say something. Say something. Don't let this. Stammer I, I you er, you have er your friends over there? Yep. Art students. They're in a bit of a league of their own but they're alright really. You wanna come over? Glance at the clock finish in ten. Sure, I get off soon, just let me. Yep, of course. Just like that. Of course. With ease we drift. Step back. And he not trying to conceal his smile is enveloped from my sight, back into the throng.

Quick wash up let hair down. Leave the crowd behind, all grasping tenners and shouting orders. Someone else's problem now. This is my time. My figure on the mirrored wall walks tall. Tell myself that I am, that I have. I've got this. Walk towards him and his herd with a faint tinge of. Weak legs. No. I am tall. And with this tall the night begins.

He greets me with the warm grin of an old friend. Two three four others seated. Smart trousers sweaters glasses. Here sit here. Eight eyes glance and one lip curls. Drink? Carefully I perch, taking my position on this weird sofa of men. With knees spread wide to mine hiding. Be unobtrusive. He giggles. Don't be nervous, they're pussycats eh? Boys. It's not an interview. A group interview. The girls huddle around the table we size each other up and over. Nudge a short my way. Gin. Get it down ye! An Irish

tongue coos. Where is he. So far. Four kneecaps away and I want to be nearer to try and find where he's been. All this time. Try to find, to talk. But one of the sweater glasses boys interrupts asks What's ya name. Harriet say I. You local? Yeah just up near Hackney Downs. Howzat then? S'alright. Feel his gaze pressing through the small talk and I. Itch. Another world, it seems, this life of art in Central. They are architecture and illustration and paintings I've never heard. Not I. Try to keep the conversation on them but they ask Who am I? and I don't tell. Not I. Think fuck I could do with a line. I tell instead a life of a mother and a father who, yes, both lawyers, and I. No brother no sister. Why didn't I go to university. Not sure, might still. Twenty is not that old. I, I, I. He senses the pressure and What's this, twenty questions! Releases the yabber yabber somewhat. And have another gin. The herd soften and we slowly dissolve into the late weight of the night, stretching open the last of the hours passing drinks and sharing jokes. Relax into soaking up this presence this atmosphere that smells of young and earnest. Like a sponge I heavy with their style, borrow it for a bit and pretend that I am too what they all are.

Let's get out of here shall we? In this the witching hour he sneaks into my ear and asks. To leave these others behind and stumble on to the wet pavement where the belly of the night gurgles Autumn drizzle. Fresh. He is looking at me with his hands. D'ya like dancing? Little jiggle on the spot. Dancing. I um. I don't think I'm very good. Don't matter. That cute 't' drop. Mah-*uh.* D'ya like it? come with me. Takes my hand in the gloam and leads to another bar, somewhere on the dark side of Mile End. Through the shifting figures we edge on the stick floor to the swerving lights. No talk no chat no awkward this or that. I am Harriet that he's just met not Harriet that he doesn't know yet. Pulls me close and breathe him in. We. Move like perfect shapes. In and out. And this is it, I think. This is it, inside the scoop of his arms and the spin of his step. This is the only moment that has ever happened. Anything before has been a trick, a glitch. A shift in a world that had yet to form. He is here. Now. As though he had never left. Or had never not been. He is here to keep me from the things that never happened. He I am Safe. In hands that are not. Hands that are his and not. Yours. Your. Your brother hands flinch hands that.

You ok? He oozes in the sudden stop still. The soft of his sweat against my cheek as I Yes I'm good. I'm good. Don't stop. But the music the people the air pause so we can stand and be. So I can hear his purr. Unzips my lips with his finger and kisses a pill that gets shared between his tongue and me. That chemical swallow, and his eyes electric twitch cross mine. For now the night slows to a beat. Thud, and thud. We thud, too. Thud to the lights. And the claps. Steady and drop. Another. I sink now. With him. Sink and rise. To that rush that fill me up, a current that begins. In the base of my. Feet. And with these feet we are suddenly out. Caught out by the end of the night. Cast out to a waxing dawn to walk London at a zig-zagging pace. It's late. It's early. Earlier than I thought. We drift through the streets oblivious to anyone everyone. Agreeing with mouths to go back to his mine, his? Yes. That fuzzy ecstasy whirring in our blood as we all elbows and knees find our way through Victoria Park. Squirm under the white light of the bus. Shiver in the early frost crystal breath fingers wrapped into his. And finally to the long brick building sprawling over tarmac. Four floors high spooking up through the morning mist. Halls are

nuffin' classy he jokes. Takes my hand. Again. Fiddles his keys and leads me down alien corridors. Blue carpet, smell of must and weed and doors after another after another after another. Stealing peeks through open cracks as we go. Bodies basking in the quiet of the small hours. This is me says he, and stops a moment. Turns and sharp breath. Strip light sings, and I find myself. Worrying for the first time. Maybe he's, what if he's. Wrap my denim a little tighter and glance three doors down to a curly head that throws a knowing smile. But the melt of his eyes wins me and Fuck it, we're in.

In is cheap wood and thin curtains. Mottled carpet and plain bedclothes. His single bed. Tidy. Corner of gathered plastics and fabrics and What's this? to break the silence. That ha oh that is er, a recycling project. Gestures to make it seem smaller. Part of a sustainability module. Make something out of old stuff. It's dumb really. It's not, protest as I tweak a slivered wire that frays to wrap around wrinkled paper. Here. Thumbs a cigarette out to me and hops onto the bay window desk. Sit with me. I join, head lurched under low cupboards. Breathing deep the morning he speaks into the fresh. I've seen. I've seen you before. At The Dolphin. Oh? I have a stalker. No I, ha, you just always. Stood out. I meant to speak to you the last time I saw but, well anyway. I say this is the first quiet moment we've had all night. And conversation. Proper he giggles. And with that he looks straight through my eyes straight through my skull into the back of my head. I guess conversation is for later. Maybe that, yeah. Tease. He leans across the window and I am quick to fizz from the inside. A dreaded pleasure or a pleasured dread my heart does a throat-thump. This man is kissing me. Does he notice? My breath falter. Scrabble for that confidence I feigned. That got buried in lager and charlie, I. Stand up, he say stand up. And my wobble legs obey to a height where I am perched between his seated on his desk. My face he brings down until I sink into the pillow of his lips and shock at the feel of his hands under my shirt. Skin slips under his fingertips and tingles, is it? The pills or. Me responding, I, fuck. So quick. One hand expertly flicks open buttons and the other frantics with jeans. Just, yeah just ha, pull them. Awkward them down my long legs. Shirt gone and bra ping off.

And there I am bared before him, shying pink all over my white. He has peeled me down to my skin and cast me adrift, alone. Offshore. Pulls me back with mouth to breast and I Ah! at his teeth thrilling me down to my. I don't know what to do. Will he know that I don't. Desperate to make myself normal with him, I fumble. T-shirt. Belt. Um. My fingers shaking 'til he catch and kiss. Turns my face into his and stands. Taller, over me now. Onto the sheets spread like welcome and he meets me on the duvet. Quick kisses on my shoulder and he above me pulls my legs down. My tremble body under his persuading tongue but he stops and Is this ok? Yes, God yes. This isn't your first. No. God no. Think what he doesn't know. It's just I. Not since. Nerves wracking. He soothes It's ok and untangling my limbs Fuck you're beautiful, helps himself to my shivering breasts stomach down and down and I wriggle upwards but he at my modesty tugs Let me, let me, until I give. He is further and further until he. Undoes me with his work. He. Tongues me open. My writhing spine tongues me inside out and wide open. So this is. This is what free is. The first time I've known a love that is shaped like this with licks

and. Coats me in a film of wet that I've not. Ever. Wrapped toes curled fingers grip I bring me fuck I. As close as I can. Until my whole body. Beats. My whole body. Heart beats. Body beats. But. I. I. I. Then we're back rippling up to the surface panting and clutching and I can see I can feel I can see that he is. So ready, with my ready all over. Eyes on mine he I just, fuck, he confess head on my chest. I really need to fuck you now. And I with a guiding hand grasp at that hard, stare up and prepare.

Take him. Flesh. And try not to think.

One hungry slip and. Protection is an endnote. Before we merge until we are. Just floating parts. So deep in me. A slight sting. Shudders. Just stay here, I say. To myself I say. Just stay here. Ignore the knock, the knock at the door of. As you. Dance across. As you lightening flash. As you. Whisper to me from the margins and speak to me yes no in double spaces. No. With his brown eyes, I wrap and entwine. I am here, with his pace, steady. So far up inside. This is not. The same. To be hurt by him, it's not. He tender hurts. The same. Lights a fire up in me. That I want him to have until he can hardly. The heat, he can't stand. And I can see that he thinks about it for a moment but at the last second he Fuck I want to but I can't, I have to. Pulls away from. But please come back. To me. All of him drained on me and he returns. Not caring of the mess, he folds me in an arm and we just. Lie in this. Little river of love.

Holds me like crystal. Let me get you a towel. Jumps up and no shyness now just full and naked. See little fingernail marks in his velvet dark skin, from. So good. Take in each other awhile. Skin throbs warm. Here you go, and he curls back to me his eyes my eyes I look and he does too. Cradled in this heaven of towel and sheet gently, wiping up. No words right now to speak just air we breathe that soft exhale and listening. To each other's. And music above. Thumping next door. Traffic out and loud. Folds into a drum of humming that entrances we, my stranger and me, to hush and drift, start to screen and filter. No hurry. Today can wait. That gentle tic and twitch my toes winding down. From the rush of the night. The tide retreats. Lay me down. To here this slippery this sand, this lapping at my arms my legs. Lay me down to. Light switch flick and deep sigh beside. Swilling swirling gurgle down. Inside. The ocean slosh. My mother. Falling. My mother falls to the bottom of the world. To find. You, that tap-tap on the window disturbs me from my. Whose day dream? Mine. What's that hello and you're through there dumbly tapping gurgling happy. Who. Harriet. Peering through the glass press nose hot breath flush up. Dark eyes like you I have and you're staring at me.

Ok. Come in. You come in now. Stay here. You are not eating again. Daddy. Harriet. Daddy made that for you. In this our kitchen. Made it for your eating not your smearing hands wipe around like you always. Those clacking sounds stick dry. Dommyyyyy you say Dommy. Why are you not eating playing. Stupid tongue that flops around Harriet see ahhh open ahhh like this. Daddy says in your cakehole. Haha cakehole. Show me your cakehole Harriet. Show me. Here. Finger push it ram it down mash sausage push it down. Your little tiny choking giggle. Gagging throat push and wriggle. Until. Spasm heave. Vomit cascade haha erupts. Cakehole Harriet face splat down. Blurble murble. Show me.

Brings the rest deep retch out. Show me. Show me your cakehole. Show me your cakehole. Harriet. Show me your fucking hole, Harriet. Harriet.

Harriet.

Harriet.

Wake. Wake up. Are you?

Gentle he, shock. Shock me back. Eyeballs roll murrrr. Past winks and passes past. You pass. Into the back, now. What was that all about? You were. Asleep. I think but you were. Kind of convulsing. And breathing weird. Feeling ok? Oh I breeze say, that's odd. Lie not had that happen before. Twist my mouth into I'm ok and clumsy around for clothes. Are you leaving? He surprise reaches after. No, I. Stop wait. I was going to but. I don't have to. Tucking my embarrassment behind he fondles my hair and we falter and silently agree. We're not ready to go back to the world. Just for this morning. But break this tender because it's early days. I'll say. Don't really know him, but. We can, just for this morning. Can I use the loo? Just down on the right. Mind what you might see in there he smirks.

In the bathroom I catch my breath in the limescaled sink. Get that yuck out of my mouth. The taste of a full night. In the mirror I see a vague haze of Was that a dream? Bubbling in my throat and a heaving down further. Quick wipe it off. Wipe it all off. Fresh myself a new woman. Think Cheryl will be worrying. Return now I should. He waits and I. Try. But my hands, my hands stay. Stuck on the ceramic. This firm sink grip. Ceramic hands. Glance down to their reddening blueing veining. Throttling. I with a deep breath one, two, three, peel a finger. Snap back. My hands. My hands I help. Need help. Alone and I need help with this fused. Until. Panic glitching upward and outwards until. Help is a wine-soaked face that stumbles in and cubicle door slams. The slam is release, and my fingers wriggle back to me.

Click-click, click-click. To Cheryl. Still out, back l8r, c u then x.

Who do you live with? My mate, Cheryl. Although she's a. What? Bit of a dick sometimes. Just a. Bit of a job's worth you know. That's a bit harsh, she's a good friend, just. She tells me off a lot. He sitting there cross-legged on the chair with a slight. Hubris, but not. The bad kind. Flicks a cigarette into a glass. Tell me again about where you're from I know, I know you said last night but it was loud and, you know. Lewes, you grew up in Lewes. He prompt starts. Yes, and my parents are lawyers. Still? Yes, still. And they. And I. Stammer. Well. Came to London for no other reason but to start up on my own. That part's true at least. Well, it was lonely wasn't it. Never been particularly. Academic, so. I didn't get on with them that well. Scraped through school and off I went. Speak to them much? Not…really. Eyes lowered.

I think better this than my boozed father manic mother dead mother, and brother who. Tick-tick, tick can't speak it. Pitiful he accepts my sanitised tale with an ounce of polite disbelief, and we push it into

the corner. But tell me now. I breathe relief. Tell me about you. My toes under the duvet poke at his knee. Me? Yes, you're from Brixton. What's it like there? Ha! You wouldn't wanna know. Not the part I'm from anyway. Umm well I lived with my mum. She's great. No dad, not really, I. Mum's always worked really hard to get me an education, keep me outta trouble. She's not, she hasn't got an education herself mind but these books, they're all hers. Points upward to a riddling of spines lining the leaning shelf. You know any of 'em? Oh, er. Me thinking I've never read a book as he reaches his long arm and pulls one down. James Weldon Johnson. No recognition. S'ok. African-American literature isn't exactly high up on the school syllabus, ha ha. I thumb through the pages as he continues Mum got me here, really, to Saint Martins. Everyone was calling me a poof all the time for playing with clay but she encouraged me and, yeah, now I'm here. It's good, I like it. It's full of people that don't really mind what you like, or what you look like. That's a bit cliché I know. But. It's true.

I don't say much but nod in agreement. I worry. Am I boring? Girl with the silent life. He breaks the gap Do you like Sublime? I. Yeah, yeah I do. Ok good, flicks the stereo and It's actually. It's Ella Fitzgerald. The original, you know? I don't. *Summertime, and the livin' is easy.* I don't, but it's beautiful. *Fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high.* This could go on forever I think. Me content with him near and all previous. Panic. Just, melts. We sit and fill the morning with tales of him to patch over the absence of me. The singing choir he'd go to with his mum at weekends. The countries he wants to see when he gets some money. His love of, like mine, Milk Chews. We look for those little affinities. In pick 'n mix but also old music stuff. Depeche Mode. Neneh Cherry. Listen and laugh. And then, the scar on his hand from a. Playground fight. Knives hidden in the jackets of children, he says. Streaks pale and raised on his black. Up to the wrist. Fingering it gently I stroke up and down and he interrupts to gesture I'm not, I don't usually do. You know. Finger flick between me him. This. This, what, this. Just randomly bring girls back. I see. No, I know. I mean, I can tell. Surrender my caution. Whatever caution I had.

Another pause for him to break. You ever heard of this? A creased leaflet with writing leaking through the crevices. Get Your Coat. I mouthing Get Your Coat is it a group a party what? Kind of. Kind of both kind of not. It's good fun. It takes place all over the London, one every month. Invite only but I reckon I could get you in. I thinking looks more glamorous than the warehouse raves. The next one's at the London Fields Lido. Ok. So you'll come, then? Why not. Yes of course. Yes I will, yes. Yes, I'll come.

At that point the curve of his lip sinks closer towards me and I can feel his smile in his kiss. As he reaches out to touch with tongue my heart skips all over and blood races down. This weird tickling flickering that rackets around below my belly button. Think fast forward to there must be confession. He will reveal. Me. Eventually for my lie explanation. But then my mind is sky clear with his pressing.

It doesn't matter now. That's another day, not today. And as it begins to almost rain down my thighs I. Come here. And pull him back into me.

1990

The house sits white washed under a dappling sky. Summer. Always smells so because the grass is mowed flowers out milkman comes a little earlier. Dry summer this one, parched ground goes thud-thud when walking. Last day of school and Tommy arrives home. Nine years old now. Stands poking his podge face up to the July sun. Last day of school mmm thinking sucking teeth smacking lips. Aching to leave since September now six weeks free no maths no reading no morning assembly prayers sat behind girls to ponytail pull. Kick shoes off drag toes through warm earth. Hate assembly. Leaning up against gate gazing down the fields to the big water that's good for skimming stones. The big water where Mummy took her last walk. Think back to one year ago when she'd said you go on to bed, you go to bed and I'll see you in the morning which never came. Took her last walk and gone and done herself down in the deep. Three weeks went by and strange men came and went, a coronal, coron, a cor. A coroner. Came in. Said Mummy was sick it wasn't her fault heard Daddy swearing yelping where'd she find any bricks I'd hidden everything I'd tried every. Couldn't've heavied herself with lumps of marsh. Left her sucking water lungs rotting in the down. Three weeks it took 'til she bobbed up free of her anchor. Found by the neighbours' dog still it's good there's no more shouting no more. No more strange roots growing in Mummy's head. A hundred years of sleep for her and a growing life for me. Daddy said. Mummy. You go on to bed and I'll see you in the morning.

1994

I speak now. I thpeak with a big voice that says H-A-R-R-I-E-T. I'm theven, a lazy tongue I've got slow and lulling. Daddy. Jumping up and down the crispy grass it's cold it's winter. Picture painted at school today blue streaks Dommy purple bits me. Sitting in this garden corner which is ours. A private haven for stealing moments when Daddy doesn't look. It's quiet here. We have a matchstick box where we keep small secrets hidden. There's a willow tree curtain makes the entrance very grand to what Tommy calls our little hidey spot. Usually after school we sneak in here and play a funny game where Tommy checks me over, make sure I'm growing right. Fingers prod counting ribs. How many are there supposed to be anyway? Hush up and sit still, the stiller you sit the quicker this will be done. Me fingering my scratch bump bruises from nettles and a firm grip. Giggle. You've got hair like Mummy's and did you know that one day you'll grow it here as he pokes at my under knick-knacks. Reminds me of the teacher who always says wotcha and tickles by my belly button. Stand up for me now. Go on. Let me take a look at you. No taller today he says marking the tree, better luck tomorrow. Wriggles wandering hands up my dress nothing yet in the chest department either eh well I suppose you're only seven. Scrunches

fist to bop-pinch my nose our secret code. Lets me know that nothing ever is spoke about after it stays hidden behind our willow tree curtain.

Daddy cannot see us here but always finds us anyway. Finds us today between the trees and in between my measurings and pulls Tommy out by the hair scolding loudly no eyes in the back of my head make sure you keep in sight. Doesn't seem to be somehow so bad, he playing out here with me, but Daddy always seems. On the edge. With beer in hand with him. Needs to always keep an eye I've heard him say. Shouts something about last straws teachers on the phone again. Come here you but Tommy always fights with tooth and nail. Thirteen a teenager which is something different to me, all sweat smell and toughened skin. I think it must be very brave to stand up to Daddy like this. Stop. It. Loud thwack. I've said all this before. I didn't raise you like this you're supposed to set an example. Your mother would. Tommy now screaming with snot and slobber flying I hate you I hate you which fades away as he's dragged to the house and somehow I'm left behind gazing after the scene from this visible invisible. Little hidey spot. Garden corner which is ours.

In the night time tonight I'm lying there counting stars that I can't see. Thirty-three. Thirty-four. Wonder what Tommy did which was so wrong not seen him all this quiet evening. Daddy so hollering shouting. Thinking. Hear a footstep creak on the stair think here he's come to explain to me why he wasn't. Dommy. Dommy. Ssh. Dommy? Lie there numbly hope for. Dark shape speaks Harriet. Ssh. Bedclothes rumple wave up towards me something wafting. Tommy. Breath like Daddy's when he's been. That beer. Dommy? Where were. Ssh. I went out. For a while. Face in front of mine can we cuddle see eyes curdle thick in the dark. Moving over me heavy warm spider hands up around and back down. Soft he whispers poking sneaky under my nightie. Checking I'm not taller, yet. Better luck tomorrow. I'm small. Here on my bed nightie up by my neck scarf-wrapped. I'm still. His face on my chest fumbling grabbing blunt hardness pushing. Open. Creak my tremble knees open. Open sesame. Little oyster crack me open. Scoop me out with his. Pushing up in my. All of him pushing groaning up in my. Carving dry scooped shape in my tight. All up in me he squeezes desperate fit. Pressing up where my cornflakes and milk. Go. Up by. Tummy. Toy squeak he shocks the breath out of me. And I am gone. Not here. Not in bed. Crushing weight flattens me down under. I am. Dying. Is this. See my toes flailing as I sink stone sunk down. Right to the bottom. Pancake flat. Surging hot choking through my throat out of my eyes ears burning my quiver thighs. Grunting sweat trickles down. I think. Dream. Of swimming cool water. I dream. Drift let go away. But. Jolts me back with a kettle whistling pressure building. Something goes off bang fills my pain up inside. Rushing warm fills me to the top. Up I float from my. Small cotton grave. Balloon full with his. Floating ooze. Pulls the plug and give me back my breath. Wheezing catching together he and me we gasp. I see. His face a face I don't know scramble panic. Hot sting trickles out, I am leaking emptying. Empty. Stuff it wet red space with tissue. Lays me to rest all shooken up my board-stiff legs swaddled in blankies. Now to sleep hush. Now to sleep.

4. Happening Non-Happenings (and Uneven Surfaces)

This plateau takes a slightly different approach to picking apart the shape of trauma. What I have discussed and practised up until this point is writing as a method with which to present trauma as irreducible to simplifying logics of event and response. *Harriet*, my writing-machine, extracts the sensations of trauma from the frames of lived experience and makes them stand alone within the narrative, signifying 'trauma' without prior reference and thereby problematising its fixed, self-evident form. The intention of this plateau runs parallel to that of *Harriet* – it disrupts the shape of trauma by presenting it instead as singular. The difference here, however, is that I move away from conceptualising the singularity of trauma through fabulation and instead consider how trauma manifests or 'surfaces' in lived experience. What I mean by 'surface' is the point at which trauma transitions from the realm of the virtual, and is mediated into something narratable and emotional such that it becomes an actualised surface that is shared and felt across and between bodies.

Drawing on Deleuze, my argument is that, in the virtual, trauma is singular in its potential to actualise; it can go any which way because it is non-referential. Because it is singular in potential, when it surfaces, it surfaces unevenly – that is to say that trauma is never felt or experienced the-same-as by all bodies. So *lived* trauma remains singular, in all of its awkward, bumpy, and uneven manifestations. The problem comes with what I call the *smoothing* of the uneven surface of trauma, which is what gives it its shape. This is achieved through several different registers – the smooth shape of trauma can be seen in the clinical and theoretical literatures through the focus on psychic disassociation and pathological fragmentation, which is inextricable from the idea that violence is limited to catastrophic, punctual acts, and that predictable and characterisable symptoms will be precipitated. By extension, the smooth shape of trauma can be seen in sociocultural and legal practices through the co-optation and filtering of rape narratives through existing understandings of women as both vulnerable to and responsible for their abuse. Smoothing, I argue, is problematic, because it captures trauma within simplifying logics that indicate which events are 'bigger' and therefore considered more traumatic, and how those events should be responded to, based on assumptions that feelings feel the same for everyone. Essentialising femininity helps with such simplification because stories of violence can be slotted into maxims that attempt to blur consent (based on what the complainant was wearing, and so on) in order to aid an image that violence takes place 'out there', committed by someone external to usual surroundings (Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999, 234). Anything that falls short of the 'stranger danger' rhetoric, such as domestic violence, is more easily perceived as less 'real', or less extreme. This segues into another facet of this plateau, which describes the smoothing of the surface of sexual violence. Because it can be said that sexual violence *is* trauma, and because the surface of trauma is smoothed by pre-conceived

ideas of event and response, it follows that the acts of sexual violence that are thought of as most significant are the ones that are perceived to be catastrophic or exceptional. What emerges is another smoothed surface, and the consequence of this is that some voices are silenced, while others might be made louder, and some events gain more traction than others. Like trauma, violence operates in potential, and it is immanent in that potential. What I look to draw in to this conversation is an emphasis on thinking violence affectively, that is, considering the capacity of moments to have an impact even if they do not actualise. This is important because it diffuses the idea that violence is something that always features a set of hallmarks – such as the use of a weapon or force – and can be thought instead as also taking place in the capillary, slighter, and more incomprehensible moments of unease or tension.

In this plateau I put forward a concept called the 'happening non-happening', which is an attempt to both make more nuanced, and more succinct, the ideas I have just described. This sounds at first paradoxical, but what I mean is that the happening non-happening is intended as a succinct way of describing a heightened sensitivity to the affective force of moments that are difficult-to-distinguish but nonetheless produce a sense of trauma, in order to present a case that highlights the challenge of capturing trauma and violence within models that delineate event and response. The happening non-happening – as I describe it – is itself a moment of potential which has not yet become actual through the processes we use to narrate experience. Happening non-happenings are very close to the surface, they can be sensed like a glitch – a twitch of not knowing which way to turn. They are a concept with which to give a tangible weight to moments that are just emerging from the chaos of the virtual – these moments are singular when they lie in the potential of the happening non-happening, and they are singular when they surface. I draw on both Deleuze and Lauren Berlant when articulating this concept. With his theorising of the virtual and the event, Deleuze helps me to think through what comes to constitute, in common terms, a 'happening', and how this might be thought differently by problematising the usual model of recognition ('I know that what is going on in front of me is *x* because it looks like *x* that I have seen before) in order to be more sensitive to the specificities of each encounter, which are differential only to themselves. Extending on this, Berlant's ideas around what she calls the impasse – a moment which catches you out because it does not (yet) condense into conventional zones of understanding – is helpful for thinking about the 'stuckness' of the happening non-happening. The happening non-happening temporarily escapes the usual reference points because it is still coming in to the actual; it is foggy and ineffable and leaves you pondering – stuck – when trying to make sense of it. The value, I argue, of such a 'stuckness' is that it has the potential to force a moment of what Deleuze would call pure thought. It is – like Harriet – an opportunity to follow the sign of trauma, experiencing its sensations without thinking 'what is this *like*?'

In the first section of this plateau I talk about the tension that exists around defining sexual violence in the academic literature, and how what comes to count as violence is limited and classified. I then talk about this in relation to the immanent potential of trauma and violence in order to set up the discussion

that follows in the second section, which focuses on the concept of the happening non-happening. Articulating the happening non-happening in turn sets up the final discussion of the plateau – which focuses on the smoothing of the surfaces of trauma and violence. Having already spent time talking about trauma and violence in the language of affect and potential, and through the concept of the happening non-happening, it should be easier to see the limitations and problems involved in the smoothing of trauma and violence as uneven surfaces. I begin the final discussion by talking about the smoothing of the surface of trauma, and I follow on by talking about the smoothing of the surface of sexual violence. I talk about the two separately not because they are separable (sexual violence *is* trauma, as I've said) but because I refer to different ideas and examples in order to consider each. I talk initially about the silencing culture of families navigating disclosures of incest, in which dismissal and denial of the abuse can be thought of as smoothing over of its traumatic effects as the trauma spreads outwards from the survivor to other family members. I argue that such smoothing has the effect of reducing the perceived magnitude of incest as one of the most prolific forms of sexual violence. To push this further, I then turn to Sara Ahmed's (2019b) discussion of diversity policies in the academic institution as a technique of 'damage limitation', suggesting that damage limitation can be used as a term to collectively describe the practices and knowledges that work to smooth the surface of, and minimise the perceived occurrence of, sexual violence. Damage limitation, I argue, is an act of deflection in order to avoid having to admit our intimate proximity to violence. The intention is to upset the smoothing logic that positions sexual violence as catastrophic, and 'out there' at arm's length, so as to recognise that it actually happens here, on the comfortable sofa of the ordinary, and that it doesn't always look or feel how you might expect.

Trauma in Potential

How sexual violence is defined has often relied on knowledge constructed by institutions such as law and medicine that index specific bodily acts (e.g. 'rape' with clarification of vaginal or anal penetration) as violent (Dartnall and Jewkes 2013, 5; Kelly and Radford 1990, 40). That this limits what counts as violence has been recognised by a number of scholars who have emphasised the need to think the issue more broadly in order to be clearer on the extent to which violence pervades different spaces (see Pain 1991, and Mehta 1999 on fear as a space of violence). In an article by Dartnall and Jewkes (2013, 4), the authors point toward the difficulty of defining sexual violence by highlighting the variation in definition across countries, particularly with respect to placing emphasis on rape, and on the perceived characteristics that are seen to constitute rape – for example, they note that there are 127 countries in the world that are yet to criminalise marital rape. In some of the older literature on sexual violence, Kelly and Radford (1990, 40; see also Kelly 1988, chapter 5, on sexual violence as a "continuum") have identified the variation in definitions as evidence of what they call the "common sense" of violence as something that is constructed to require clear distinctions (e.g. rape/ not rape), such that accounts of

abuse quickly become invalidated if they do not fit into such a limited definition – the effect being that individuals are 'silenced', that is, they become less likely to speak up about their experiences.

Beyond somatic definitions about *what* sexual violence is seen to entail, what emerges also is a logic of *where* sexual violence is considered to happen, and which accounts 'count'. There are distinguishing ideas of what Susan Estrich in 1987 called 'real' rape – the rape that happens 'out there' at knifepoint in an alleyway, and 'simple' rape – rape that is committed by someone the complainant knows and is more easily pushed to the side through victim-blaming rhetoric, and through claiming that the waters of consent are unclear (Serisier 2018a, 36). In short, what is heard and recognised as 'real' in terms of sexual violence depends whether or not it is assimilable to normative discourses (Serisier 2018a, 48). This logic gets pushed through most sharply in the space of the courtroom, where the spectre of the stranger with a knife in a dark alley lingers. In court, complainants are subjected to an overdetermined context based on a model of violence as exceptional, and are expected to display concomitant traumatic responses that 'accurately' represent their devastation (see Gravelin *et al* 2019, and Collins and Dunn 2018 on how survivors are structured as responsible, see also Russell 2016 for a powerful analysis of the Michael and Hilary Brewer case in order to demonstrate the complicity of the law in re-structuring the accounts of complainants). I have come across an instance in the academic literature where, during cross-examination, the barrister has been reported to question the complainant's lack of biting or screaming during the attack – as if such expressions are necessary to evidence an attack – and to then go on to question the complainant's decision to sleep in the same bed as the defendant in the period of time that followed (Smith and Skinner 2017, 450 and 455). As another, more popular example, Robin Camp – the "knees-together" Canadian Federal Court judge – can be recollected to have regularly applied unequivocal tactics to complainants, posing questions such as "Why didn't you just sink your bottom down into the basin so that he couldn't penetrate you?" (Rizvic 2018, Woolley 2017)

Reacting to the limitations of such configurations, social constructionist views have been influential in highlighting how sexual violence is defined as a form of social control, and as an expression of male dominance – Susan Brownmiller's ([1975] 1993) book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape,* in particular has been significant in emphasising this. This literature draws attention to the role of power relationships in defining sexual violence – often noting the reliance upon legal definitions, and indicating how compelling they can be with the weight of seeming objectivity from the government behind them (Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999, 237). Social constructionist ideas are useful here in the sense that they raise questions about who gets to define reality and the implications of this upon other bodies, however they are also problematic because, although they attempt to broaden the scope of what counts as violence, they end up reducing violence to something structural. Paradoxically, this has the effect of assigning violence foundational characteristics and methods of functioning. Additionally, the commitment to figuring sexual violence as an expression of male dominance results in an impression of 'men' as a totalised object of structure being pushed forward. In Kelly and Radford's (1990, 40)

article, they identify "men, [who] as the perpetrators of sexual violence have a vested interest in women's silence". In this project I work to de-essentialise ideas of gender and trauma and, while it is true that sexual violence is largely perpetuated by bodies that are articulated as male, it is not enough to refer to structural power, and male bodies as owners and distributors of that power. When I talk about violence as – following Laura Brown's (1995) term – an "insidious" oppression, I don't mean that it emanates from a sovereign structure. A good friend once said to me that "people aren't like Disney villains, tapping their fingers and grinning menacingly whilst planning their attack." Violence is oppression, yes, but it is not perpetuated by an autonomously operating category that have clearly outlined interests. This idea can be linked to Kathleen Stewart's (2007, 1-7) statement that "bottom-line arguments about 'bigger' structures and underlying causes" are not helpful when trying to apprehend a reeling historical present. What she is saying here is not that the forces that are named (sexism, racism, neoliberalism) are not real or pressing, it is just that it is important to be cognisant of how they are indexed, such that they are not made to sound as though they have always already existed, and that they are forcing themselves upon an otherwise innocent world. It can be satisfying to feel as though there is a finger to point, but the only truth is that the direction in which to point is everywhere.

Capturing sexual violence as structural contributes to oversimplifying narratives that position it as something that happens 'out there'. In particular, by presenting the category of 'men' as perpetrator, it becomes easier to distance the idea of sexual violence from the intimacies of ordinary life – it has the same effect as Estrich's 'real' and 'simple' rape distinction. Men-as-perpetrator, here, are not the male bodies that are known on a day-to-day basis; they are strange, alien, they "jump[s] out of the bushes or a dark alley or break[s] into a woman's home while she is sleeping in her own bed" (Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999, 237). Recognising sexual violence as interpersonal is understudied and inhibited by the effect of such distancing arguments. Brickell and Maddrell (2016a, 207; also 2016b) have made inroads toward addressing this in the geographical literature by aiming to generate conversation on the spatial relations of violence – drawing attention to issues of, for example, same-sex, elder, and inter-familial abuse, in order to challenge the "elephant in the room" so as to think sexual violence as rooted in the praxis of everyday life (Datta 2016, 180). In a similar vein, Anindita Datta (2016, 179) develops the term "genderscapes of hate", when writing about the prolific sexual violence in India to consider violence as a steady flow that moves through the life-course of women in their everyday lifeworld and spaces, thereby lifting violence from the impression that it operates external to intimate lives through, for example, "serial rapists prowling the neighbourhoods".

Fictional literature, particularly the work of Toni Morrison and Dorothy Allison, provide even more nuanced accounts of the proximity of violence, pointing to not only its complexity and familiarity, but also to the long – and often subtle – range of its effects. These stories go a significant way to re-locating the figure of 'men-as-perpetrator' as a sole distributor of power, positioning them instead as accountable, yes, but as only one actor within pervasive environments of oppression and violence. For

example, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison ([1970] 2016) details the sexual abuse of the young protagonist by her father, Cholly, but in doing so she pieces together a story of racial self-loathing, racism, and poverty that complicates the picture. The readers are not lead towards relentless hatred for Cholly because sexual violence, here, is something that materialises through a trail of exhaustion which runs through the entire family, and which is grounded in their experience as black and poor. Similarly, Dorothy Allison's writing often appeals to the meandering trail of the traumatic effects of incest; one of her short stories, *Compassion*, appears to focus on the 20 year battle with cancer of the mother of two sisters, however the friction-inflected relationship between the sisters is the implicit focus, as they work through the tensions of having survived childhood abuse from a step-father who, on his apparently successful road to sobriety, appears oblivious to the trail of destruction that he has left behind, maintaining that he "did the best [he] could with all those girls" (2002, 206).

These examples of academic and fiction literature make clear the need to theorise sexual violence outside of structural determinations. I suggest that it is worthwhile thinking violence affectively in order to consider the capillary relations of moments and instances that make blurry the homogenising and distancing assumption that the violent event 'out there' has a catastrophic magnitude that will accordingly precipitate expected traumatic responses. However, lifting sexual violence from 'out there' is not reducible to simply recognising its familiarity as something that happens between bodies that we know. To do that would risk framing the argument within the feminist maxim 'the personal is the political' which doesn't quite get at the affective component that I foreground because, as Ann Cvetkovich wrote in 1992, the 'personal' tends to become individualised which overlooks affective life as collective and relational (Cvetkovich 1992, 4). Cvetkovich's describing of the 'everydayness' of sexual trauma that she emphasises in *An Archive of Feelings* goes some way to achieve an affective approach and is not an attempt, or is at least not *only* an attempt, to highlight sexual violence as proximate and familiar. What Cvetkovich draws attention to instead are marginalised sites of trauma, particularly sexual trauma within queer communities, that are considered less legitimate, as evidence of the specificity of trauma as felt and responded to. 'Everydayness', then, refers to affective life because it is descriptive of the complex social and cultural indexes from which bodies are inextricable (Cvetkovich 2003, 285).

In the earlier plateau, *Shaping Trauma Through Theory*, I made the claim that I was extending on Cvetkovich's thought in order to push further my thinking around the specificity of trauma or, as I have been describing it, trauma-as-singular. Just as a reminder, singularities populate virtual and actual matter – they can be sensed but they are not representable as they are differential only to themselves. What I draw attention to is the idea that actualised moments of trauma and violence are not the limit of their operation – they operate first in, and are conditioned by, the virtual. Understanding the virtual is tricky because it necessitates a disconnection with the tendency to think in terms of material zones which have clear outlines and move specifically in relation to each other (Ansell-Pearson 2005). In this

line of thinking, all other sensations are considered nebulous and less real because they do not fit into scientific, spatial terms (we can think here of how time is considered to be containable within discrete moments, or matter in terms of atoms etc) (Ansell-Pearson 2005, 1115). From a Deleuzian viewpoint, the virtual is granted an ontological existence in order to draw it away from such indeterminacy – that just because it appears peculiar, it cannot be reduced to figments or fragments of, for example, psychological consciousness. In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze ([1966] 1988, 94) writes "A philosophy such as this assumes that the notion of the virtual stops being vague and indeterminate" (Ansell-Pearson 2005, 1112). For Deleuze, the virtual is chaotic, yes, but it is no less real because it is not actual. It is also immanent, that is, differential only to itself. It does not, as Deleuze ([1969] 2004, 118) writes "resemble the corresponding empirical fields". That is to say that the virtual, although it is the genetic ground of the actual, does not resemble that which it grounds – it cannot be assimilated with individuated bodies such as a Self or an I, because that would necessitate a given resemblance (Deleuze [1969] 2004, 119). In *Harriet and the Writing-Machine* I discussed singularities in relation to the hylemorphic schema to make this clearer, suggesting that trauma, as singular, cannot be identified by saying something like 'this is traumatic' because to do so would be to impose a fixed form from without. Deleuze ([1969] 2004, 128) discusses as an example the greening of a tree as a singularity-event, moving from virtual to actual. The colour, when the tree emerges into the actual, *is* green, as singular – "it is only this colour that is green, and this green that has this shade" – its green cannot be *like* other greens that have been experienced before (Deleuze [1969] 2004, 129). Trauma, then, is not determinable based on characteristics of trauma that might have been felt before – any trauma felt *is* trauma, as singular.

In seeking to develop a more nuanced interpretation of violence, it is helpful to stay close to a Deleuzian understanding of the virtual or, as Brian Massumi describes it, "potential" (Evans 2017, n.p.). In a recent interview on how thinking in terms of affect enables a more nuanced understanding of the ways violence is extended through particular political registers, Massumi states that "violence is not only in the act. It also acts in potential. It operates even when it doesn't pass fully into action" (Evans 2017, n.p.). The reason this is important is because it gives pause through which to acknowledge the capacity of all moments to directly make a difference in world/s, whether or not they become actualised. It is difficult to give this argument the credence it deserves without facing charges of 'overcomplicating things' or having it reduced to being 'all in your head', when what is demanded is an eradication of all incomprehensibility through 'evidence', for which – as Long Chu (2017, 303) says – "affect is a lousy substitute" (Berlant 2011a, 11). What I argue is that violence doesn't begin and end with actualised expressions. It lingers beforehand in the virtual, and the points at which it influences what unfolds are many. I can turn to an example that happened to me only the other day in the supermarket. I was dressed in my sports gear, and I would usually cover my arms with a coat to go anywhere afterwards. On this day it was hot, and so I didn't wear my coat. I'd only been in the supermarket for five minutes when I received abusive comments. An incident, for sure, but I would argue that the violence began, at least,

back at the car, when I made the decision to leave my coat behind as part of a present whose contours and contents are under constant revision from the past, not as a fixed 'originary' moment, but as an always-present virtual informant (Berlant 2011a, 200).

Put differently, the way that stuff pans out, or can be said to actually 'happen', is not determined by the already-existing qualities of any given situation. For example, in *The Bluest Eye*, the fact that Cholly is raping his daughter is not determinable by his being as a 'brutal sex offender' – to assume that would be to rely on men-as-perpetrator as a structural explanation for why sexual violence exists (Serisier 2018a, 36). The violence is not reducible to identifications of Cholly's character, or to the punctual act that brought the violence to expression in bodily aggression (Evans 2017, n.p.). The violence instead looms in the virtual. This means that any actual encounter, before it emerges, is conditioned by the virtual which, although modally distinct from the actual, is no less real because of it. The virtual is a realm of infinite and immanent potential, consisting of "differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them" (Deleuze [1968] 2014, 269). This means that the actualisation of the virtual can proceed any which way because the virtual is chaotic and indeterminable; we can think back here to the partial objects discussed in the narrative of *Harriet* – they proceed by connecting without resulting in a unified Whole. All of this, however, is not to say that the moment of violence between Cholly and his daughter might have ever actualised differently, but what I *am* saying that there are no 'givens' upon which the encounter can be understood.

The immanent potential of violence and trauma, then, is inseparable from actualised moments, and it is only in becoming sensitive to this that it is possible to start approaching trauma as what I will describe later in this plateau as 'uneven' in its surfacing. It is the virtual that conditions the actual surface of trauma as uneven, and it conditions it as uneven because the virtual is chaotic. However, it is our universalising abstractions that smooth the surface of trauma in order to simplify that chaos when narrating experience, and this is how we end up with limiting ideas of what counts as traumatic experience, and how it should be felt and responded to by the traumatised. What I focus on in the next section of this plateau is my concept of the 'happening non-happening', which refers closely to the transition from the virtual to the actualised surface of trauma. The happening non-happening is just bubbling at the surface – it makes itself affectively felt through a sense of unease. It is critical to address the happening non-happening *before* the surface of trauma (and, by extension, the surface of sexual violence) is discussed at length because it is – in emerging from the chaos of the virtual – directly determining of its unevenness.

A Happening Non-Happening Is

> "(If a girl experiments it's a failure to do something; if a boy does it's called courage and vision—all too often). I can't really tell the story of the non-encounters that produced this observation, but they had nothing to do with me personally. I just saw them not happen, over and over, during the conference I just attended, when suddenly I broke into fantasies of leaving the profession forever" (Berlant 2010).

A happening is an actualised moment. It is "the moment in which the event is embodied…, the moment we designate by saying "*here*, the moment has come'" (Deleuze [1969] 2004, 172). We might see it, or hear it. A door slams; a plane passes overhead. What is commonly termed 'the event' is some*thing* that happens; it has a corporeality like the door, or the plane. However, the more intensely, or accurately, it is thought to have been felt, the more it earns its denotation 'event'. What I mean by 'accurate' is that a happening seems to gain more credence if it is seen to precipitate predictable affective reactions. If there are inconsistencies, then the legitimacy of the happening gets called into question. In her article, *Study in Blue: Trauma, Affect, Event,* Andrea Long Chu (2017) remarks on the difficulty of articulating happenings that seem a little fuzzy, like a coincidence or a misunderstanding in which the feelings of the bodies involved might not correspond with what you might expect. If the dots don't join up then it is easy for the happening to fail to reach the status of 'event' because it slips under its "unassailable" and "airtight" rubric (Long Chu 2017, 303). When it comes to violence, for example, Long Chu (2017, 304) writes that there are clear instructions for what affects are politically admissible. Salience, and undisputable characteristics qualify a violent happening – it is always horrifying, and visible, for example. But what if it is innocuous, quiet, doesn't feel altogether unpleasant, or almost completely escapes your notice? Does that mean that it is not violence, or that it didn't 'happen'? Incomprehensibility often generates a sense of the heebie-jeebies because it threatens to dissolve what is thought to be the 'specificity' that is depended on in order to say 'this happened'. However, as I discussed in *Shaping Trauma Through Theory,* this type of specificity is not very specific at all – because it hinges on the tendency to think in spatial terms and relies on the erasure of processual changes in order to think the event in states and magnitude (this *happened,* or this *didn't* happen, with little attention to anything in between). In *Parables for the Virtual,* Massumi (2002, 1) warns against the reductive empiricism that appears blind to the durational movement of sensation and bodies, and so the "grandness of periodic rupture", such as a happening that is recognised as violent, appears as such because it seems to have come out of nowhere – a sudden change. What this does is cut off the affective feed that actually demands attention to specifics and subtle shifts. It leaves to the side the slightness of qualitative changes that are always ongoing whether or not we can make sense of them.

Incomprehensibility, and the heebie-jeebies that follow, can be thought of as evidence to avoid accounting for the modes of existence that appear peculiar or ineffable (Ansell-Pearson 2005, 1116). Bergson, whose thought is critical to Deleuze's theorising of the virtual as having a genuine ontological existence, is clear to state that the idea that science pushes forward is one that contracts life into distinct and reciprocal material zones that correspond directly with what are thought to be the natural articulation of things – the result is an image of a world whose processes are perfectly continuous, comprised of bodies with clearly defined outlines where change takes place in linear and homogenous space-time (see Bergson [1911] 1944, 1-109; Ansell-Pearson 2018, 62). Anything that sticks out is marked as incompatible with "the general properties of matter" (Bergson [1911] 2016, 95). What this clouds is the moving *dis*continuity of the real, which necessarily involves the virtual, and is marked by a non-linear infinite divisibility of bodies and events that may or may not come to pass in the actual – existence here is an extended continuum of "modifications, perturbations, changes in tensions, or of energy", and that that in itself is continuous as part of the rhythm of duration (Bergson [1911] 2016, 96). So, when Deleuze ([1969] 2004, 172) writes "why is every event a kind of plague, war, wound, or death?", what he means by this is why must that which gets called an event have to refer to a happening with a sense of enormous magnitude or catastrophe? This is an example of thinking in linear and homogenous terms. For Deleuze, an event does not correlate with either – it is not defined or distinct, but begins from and is always operating within the virtual (see Deleuze [1969] 2004, 169-174, also 166-167 on the actualisation of the event).

Similarly, in the line of thinking that Bergson takes to critique, the commonly understood event denotes a change in properties – properties being thought of as characteristics or 'givens' that are proper to the event (such as the chronological timeline in which the event is thought to happen). Knowing that a change is taking place (something is shifting) relies on a model of recognition – what is assumed is that something is happening because stuff seems different to what it was before (Bowden 2011, 18). We seek to assess the level of impact and index characteristics of the happening based on previous events, and consider what sort of semantic and moral narratives the happening fits into. For example, my experiences of therapy involved framing my abuse within specific theoretical narratives in order to make recognisable sense of it. This creates a level of stability for what is otherwise potentially too chaotic to determine – there is a territorialising of materials, sensations, and feelings into a stable refrain that says something like 'this car crashed, it happened one hours ago, and that is a terrible thing'. However, like the event does not correlate with magnitude or catastrophe, the event for Deleuze does not refer back to anything in order to be recognised; it is ontologically prior to fixed and measured things (Bowden 2011, 17). We might say 'something is happening here', but that something is always happening in itself (Dewsbury 2000, 474). It is marked with differentiation such that it is not possible to establish a logic of happenings and their according refrains. The event, Deleuze writes, is pure – it has a 'thisness' – the immanent consequence of becoming (see Deleuze [1969] 2004, 73 on the pure

event in empty time) “it is always and at the same time something which has just happened and about to happen; never something which is happening”, see also Badiou 2007, 40).

Both Lauren Berlant and Deleuze talk about the event as part of the process of becoming, however for Berlant (see 2008, also 2011a, 10, and 2011b, 2) the event is already actualised and her focus is instead on the processes she terms “crises”, and “situations” as that which become-event. An event has genres, that is, it is invested with zones of affects and feelings that tell a story which we recognise (Berlant 2011b, 2). Moments of crisis, or situations, are moments where those conventional zones are upset or haven’t condensed yet (Berlant 2008, 5). The state of things changes into something that can’t be anticipated, and suddenly you are faced with the task of living on, or reproducing life, in the absence of genres and narratives (Berlant 2008, 5). What approaches instead is what Berlant (2011a, 4) terms an impasse which, although denotes a period of suspension, is intended as a transition – a shift. Deleuze would call this a threshold, prior to becoming something else, that differs only from itself – there is hesitation; a sense of stuckness precisely because the way things usually play out halts, and you aren’t sure where you are (see Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 271-360, also O’Sullivan 2016, 172-189). But it is the very fact that this moment lacks a normative shape that allows it to open up to change – it is an opportunity for things to be felt out and lived in a different way. In this sense, the impasse is like the space of the pure event – it is non-referential. Form is suspended, making space not for the creation of *another* overarching narrative to be followed, but to attend to life as it unfolds in its singular way.

It is here, drawing on both Deleuze’s theorising of the virtual and the event, and Berlant’s impasse, that I locate my concept of the happening non-happening. A happening non-happening is specific to the context of trauma – it is a moment of affective transition before that moment becomes imbibed with the normative expectations required for it to become an identifiable or discrete happening. There is a sense that something is going on in front of you, with you, but it doesn’t, or doesn’t *yet* step into the genres and trajectories by which we anticipate life to unfold. It might leave you scratching your head. It is outside of, or immanent to, the patterns of the reproduction of life.

I have termed happening non-happenings in a deliberately playful way, because I want to hold attention to the term ‘happening’ as a reminder to be critical of what is thought to constitute such a thing. My intention is to bring to the fore the importance of moments that are happening even if they might not be thought of as such. All stretches of life have obscure contours. We think we can navigate them, and we certainly try to navigate them according to everything we’ve watched, read, looked at, been told, but we never really catch up with life as it unfolds. We are over-stimulated toward particular narratives (do well at school, get married) and it is common to find someone saying ‘I feel like life is passing me by’ even if they have ticked a lot of the boxes set out by the narrative. There is often a sense that, somehow, you’re missing the forest for the trees. Happening non-happenings, then, are a term for addressing the encounters that escape the points of reference that usually enable clarity of a situation.

Narratives and points of reference are not necessarily ineffective – they are rhythms for coping with chaos. Yet they are effective precisely because of their tendency to homogenise and simplify the excess of life. Berlant (2011a, 10) has suggested that there is often an ahistoricising logic used in which moments of violence that are identified as discrete are thought to have somehow come out of nowhere, rather than being a temporary amplification of something that was always already in the works. My approach here is part of an attempt to be contextually sensitive to those moments so that they don't lose traction from the social fabric from which they emerged. Something that is sensed as traumatic does not have to slot in to meaningful narratives in order to qualify as an event. It might be a gesture, or a glance. Your affective responses are set off but you aren't sure how to filter the sensations in order to make sense of them. This is the happening non-happening – an immanent, non-referential moment in which you feel stuck, hesitant, as Berlant (2011a, 199) says you feel like you are "dogpaddling around the same space". Let's say that what is sensed is a glance. Facial expressions are usually read and indexed according to specific traits and a chain of signification; a face that seems happy *because* of a new job, or a face that seems sad *because* of the loss of a loved one (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 196). But this particular face – this glance – escapes the indexes; it is imperceptible. It triggers a sweat, an unease, a loss for words. This is the point at which trauma functions; like a wave washing over you, it is experienced in its purity without expectations or attachments. You feel the sensation of trauma without it bearing resemblance to "trauma" commonly understood. Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2013, 131) would say that the glance is a sign without meaning: "it doesn't matter what it means, it's still signifying". What the glance is signifying at this point, is trauma.

The trauma that is signified, however, reaches further than the glance itself and the affective responses. It involves all of the forces of relations of the encounter – actual and virtual, which are no less real (Deleuze [1968] 2014, 272). The whole assemblage slips under the radar of the conventions and genres needed to narrate it in common sense terms. It is a moment of pure potential – what might be considered a glitch in the conditions of how life is ordinarily reproduced (Berlant 2011a, 198). Yet the moment is soon inevitably captured and coded. This is what I will explore in the following section as 'surfacing'. The moment accrues a density as you scramble to shape it into some understanding with words until someone cuts in with 'are you sure that's how it happened?' – a question that acts as a dumping ground for potential. Affects and sensations fizzle off, or they become squeezed into patterns of negation that index what is steadily becoming perceived as a non-event. It feels like a sleight of hand, although you aren't sure why. The glance starts to look a little different; maybe it was nothing after all. You murmur 'no, I guess not' and, suddenly, it's a happening that didn't *really* happen.

Happening non-happenings do not flatten out the specificities of trauma, and they don't amount to the same as saying 'everything is traumatic'. What defines trauma is a sense of being overwhelmed, but what is overwhelming might have unclear margins. Happening non-happenings are also not about describing the lower case drama of social life. By this I mean that happening non-happenings don't

refer to something like microaggressions. While microaggressions describe affective scenes in which it can sometimes be difficult to put your finger on what is traumatic, there is generally an expression that can already be indexed according to prior experience – an unwanted touch or unsolicited address, for example. Or, even slighter are the instances that happen to me not infrequently – such as receiving a smaller plate of food than my male partner when dining at a friend's house, or being apologised to by a group of men if they swear within the conversation. Microaggressions can also be captured as 'small' things (albeit with significant cumulative impact), and the idea of scale is something that I am keen to interrupt. The difference, as I see it, is that happening non-happenings are moments of transition in which state, scale, and recognisable characteristics cannot be precisely determined. They are moments of immanence, not recognition, whereby the sensation of trauma is singular, and cannot be determined via reference to underlying things (Bowden 2011, 18). They can be thought of as a sort of short circuit of thought – an unexpected transition where the flow is unimpeded, permitting an enormous excess of current that is usually constrained to expected paths.

What I feel distinguishes the happening non-happening most clearly from otherwise 'small' or 'everyday' happenings is the sense of stuckness, or hesitancy, that marks the transition. I want to draw attention to hesitancy, and what that hesitancy has the potential to do. In *Harriet and the Writing-Machine* I discussed the writing as an apprenticeship to the sign of trauma, and how Harriet is a follower of its sign. Here, what I suggest is that the happening non-happening can also be an apprenticeship to the sign of trauma. Staying with the hesitancy involves remaining absent from the search for the 'truth' about what is being sensed ('what does this *mean*?' 'what does this feel *like*?') and being open to feeling stuck in order to suspend, or delay, the form of trauma. Dithering around in the chaotic space of the happening non-happening as a shift is unsettling because existence and experience are usually pre-pronounced by *a priori* ideas, and it is this that engenders the comfort of 'knowing' how to go on (Dewsbury 2000, 493). That same dithering, however, can also be a technique of building new habits of thought; it is a way of thinking the possibility of being more responsive and pliable, rather than universalising, when narrating trauma (Berlant and Stewart 2019, 59). Happening non-happenings, then, don't possess meaning, but, as I described with the example of the glance, they are still intelligibly felt and sensed. They are a reminder to pay attention to processes of worlding, shaped as they are by moods and atmospheres that don't play into genres and trajectories. A lack of attention to such processes is how smoothing occurs, which is the focus of the next section – how simplifying logics of trauma and violence are developed.

Smoothing Uneven Surfaces

Happening non-happenings are singular, but they are not single. If we go back to the example of the glance, the trauma of the happening non-happening surfaces – not only in the traumatised body, but

across and through the other human body – the one delivering the glance – and all the bodies in between. The moment – saturated with affect in a way that is difficult to articulate – starts to swell; like a snowball it gathers its size by accruing meaning through rhythms effected by sight, touch, hearing, and folding into shared practices of signification – words, behaviours, gestures – until it moves from imperceptibility, to narratability (Brennan 2004, 70). It gets captured within the patterns by which we reproduce life, until – unlike the moment's non-referential origins – it begins to look *like* something; something that has been seen and experienced before. Suddenly, it has a reference point.

The surface of the trauma is actualised; you can speak it, feel it, and describe it. However, although this surface is shared, it is necessary to realise that it is not experienced in the same way by everyone; it surfaces unevenly. Perceptions of the happening non-happening will vary and emotions, though named the same, won't feel the same. In this particular instance, the air seems thick, and you can feel it in a way that you can describe. This shared reference point might be expressed through the idiom 'you could cut the air with a knife', but it would be problematic to assume that the air's thickness feels the same for the other body. Emotions play a critical role here because feeling, and naming feeling, is one way in which the surface of the encounter becomes narratable. Following Sara Ahmed, emotions circulate, but what passes on is not the same. I might say 'I feel uncomfortable' and then you might say 'I also feel uncomfortable', but to suggest that the discomfort has been passed through a form of contagion, Ahmed (2004a, 10) writes, is to suggest not only the possibility of possession of the emotion, but that the emotion has unchanging, a priori characteristics, and is felt the same by the two bodies. This is part of Ahmed's model of emotion as de-centred from the subject; instead, like affect, emotions are about responsiveness between bodies (Schmitz and Ahmed 2014, 98; see also Ahmed 2004b especially 26-30, and Ahmed 2004c especially 118-119). They are not pre-saturated with meaning, but instead are constitutive of the very surface upon which we can say 'I feel' (Ahmed 2004a, 10). Here, the discomfort passes-between, for sure, because it is part of the surface of the moment that is shared, but there will be nuanced differences between what is sensed and articulated as 'discomfort'.

Denise Riley (2005, 5) discusses language as having an affective force – that it is possible for words to work outside of their "official content", and to stand apart from the intentions of the individual speaker. This is critical to understanding how the uneven surface of trauma becomes smoothed into universalising ideas of what comes to qualify as traumatic, and how it *should* feel. In the example of the glance, you might be told that 'it's nothing', and the phrase might be elicited with a terse voice, and a persuasive cadence. The moment is thus presented as a 'small' thing – breezily dismissed – and so it can't possibly feel that bad. It can't feel bad because small things are just not that big of a deal. If bodies are exposed to repetitions of smoothing which, in this instance, is an informing of what 'nothing' is and how it feels, then it is possible for a basis to be formed upon which to orientate other homogenising perceptions. For example, political and cultural narratives around which events are considered significant, and which bodies are worth grieving for or sympathising with – Laura Brown (1995, 102)

has noted – generally comes down to whether or not the dominant group can participate as a victim. There are resonances here with Judith Butler's (2009, 3) concept of grievable life, in which certain bodies are framed through social crafting in ways that position them as grievable or less grievable. For example, those injured or lost in the Grenfell Tower fire were bodies grieved less due to their social positioning as working class (Madden 2017, 4; Shildrick 2018, 791-793). As a contrasting example – the death of Princess Diana was considered an enormous loss, predicated significantly on her status as a figure worth mourning: wealthy, white, and a member of the Royal Family (Shome 2001, 324; Roberts 2005, 32).

The paradigm that trauma is exceptional is ineffective to describing the very *unexceptional* precarity to sexual violence that is experienced by bodies. The expectation that trauma must appear to be catastrophic makes it easier to smooth its surface. Additionally, for some, the exposure and vulnerability to sexual violence is much higher, and so the effect of smoothing trauma over can be far more injurious. In cases of incest, for example, families making sense of the abuse frequently discount the trauma of it via a silencing culture (Donalek 2001, 574; Bass *et al* 2006, 87). The idea that incest is "not in this house", as Elizabeth Wilson (1995) has described it, has the potential for survivors of the trauma to experience it in a sort of glazed over and hazy way – the developmental consequences of which have been reported to include a distorted sense of self and of the period of abuse, as if it was possible that the whole thing had been imagined (Phillips-Green 2002, 198; Laviola 1992, 413). Upon disclosure of the abuse, framing it as a 'mistake', 'normal', or keeping it totally secret, have been described as techniques of minimising and normalising it, but can also be thought of as a smoothing of the trauma as it spreads outwards from the victim to the family, so that it is felt 'less', and in part to uphold family loyalties (Bass *et al* 2006, 87; Donalek 2001, 573). This is particularly prevalent in cases of sibling incest, in which the parents can be more reluctant to admit that the abuse has taken place – because to do so would be to admit that there is something 'bad' about their son (Phillips-Green 2002, 196). I have a good friend for whom this experience is first-hand, with her mother being in almost complete denial of the sibling incest my friend had endured over a prolonged period, despite the disclosure resulting from her mother's accidental witnessing of the abuse. Having the abuse minimised as a misunderstanding blurs the internal boundaries set within family dynamics, and – with the survivor frequently being framed as somehow responsible for anything that may have occurred – their trauma is quickly smoothed into a nothingness (Phillips-Green 2002, 197). For my friend, the years following the abuse have been marked not only by a level of isolation from the family, but also by a shouldering of responsibility to keep the trauma at a low level for the sake of other family members, achieved by consistently performing a certain 'okay-ness' in front of them.

I say this while being sensitive to the gendered charges that accrue against mothers in cases of incest which are present in several different registers, from academic to cultural (Ford and Crabtree 2002, 68). The mother is framed as the focus of need for not only the children, but also – in cases of father-daughter

incest – the husband (Donalek 2001, 580). Her failure, described in testimonials as a lack of mother-child connection and a lack of attention to the husband, and in psychological literature as "distant" and "inaccessible" amounts to her failure to have prevented the abuse from happening, which deflects responsibility from the male perpetrator (Phillips-Green 2002, 198; Armstrong 1979, 57; Ford and Crabtree 2002, 57; Hardy 2001, 257). However, even without the prefix of what has been described as "mother blaming", what remains as a result of living in a "silencing home" is a reducing of the perceived magnitude of one of the most persistent and prevalent forms of sexual violence, in which families not showing overt signs of dysfunction can effectively be inoculated from suspicion both outside of and within the family (Green 1996, 322; Jacobs 1990, 502; Donalek 2001, 580; Salter 2016, n.p.).

The way that trauma surfaces interrupts what I described earlier as the image of a perfectly reciprocal and continuous world. Inconsistencies disrupt linearity – the comfort zone of thinking happenings in terms of high to low, significant to non-significant, and big to small. Violent moments receive similar treatment; like trauma, violence-in-potential is chaotic and indeterminable, and it surfaces unevenly. I have discussed already in this plateau the difficulty in attempting to define sexual violence. As far as it is possible to separate trauma from sexual violence, I draw attention now to the smoothing of the surface of sexual violence because there are some interesting implications that are worth discussing that come with attempts to frame what is considered to be the 'event' of violence. For example, I have often felt compelled to reconstruct my story of abuse to correlate with what I can only describe as a smoothing equation of high magnitude=devastating effects. The abuse I experienced was committed under conditions of familiarity, and so perceptions of its magnitude have been reduced accordingly. I wasn't held at knifepoint by someone I didn't know. I went there willingly, most days for around a year. He made me dinner, he would buy me presents, and he would spike my drink. I have been asked by people why I did not stop drinking the drinks that I knew were spiked after a while. The truth is that I knew what was going on, but I didn't know what to make of it. The drink made me feel relaxed, and uninhibited. It became a routine that I got used to. I have been asked "why didn't you leave?" "Weren't you scared?" "Do you think there was a part of you that wanted it?" in order to try to fold my story into an understanding of sexual violence clearly demarcated as horrifying, and overwhelming. But it wasn't. It was slow-burning, confusing, and not always unpleasant. My therapist called this 'grooming' but I don't feel that term is sufficient – it grounds the argument, again, in structure. Not only does it place me as passive in a situation solely choreographed according to the intentions of the man that was abusing me, but it also distances him from all of the complex relational encounters in which we were entwined. That year will have been littered with happening non-happenings not reducible to him, or me. It is difficult to say this without making it sound like I am trying to alleviate him of responsibility, and shoulder some of it myself. My claim is actually the opposite. Trying to define sexual violence as something concrete and universalising that can be understood in terms of event/response, and perpetrator/victim makes it easier to be insensitive to the nuances of the issue – the consequences being,

for example, the lack of success for complainants in court cases due to being subjected to black-and-white interrogation techniques (e.g. 'You either wanted it, or you didn't. Which is it?').

Smoothing the surface of sexual violence, in this case, is not only a technique with which to narrate life in simpler terms. It is also an act of deflection in order to avoid admitting an intimate proximity to violence. In Lauren Berlant's (2011a, 10) argument for a shift away from framing trauma as catastrophic, she describes the present as structured through "crisis ordinariness", which embeds the extraordinary within the ordinary, that is, trauma – things that are overwhelming – "always turn out to be an amplification of something that is already in the works". What we call 'trauma' is, for Berlant, a condition of constant vulnerability within everyday life (Berlant 2011a, 11; Coddington and Micieli-Voutsinas 2017, 1). The acts of sexual violence that are registered as profound, then, such as Estrich's identification of 'real' rape, do not just come out of nowhere. Similarly, those acts are not the only moments of violence. Violence is always around the corner, simmering in potential and moments of unease, and smoothing its surface takes work.

To demonstrate this, I draw on Sara Ahmed (2019b) in order to think the smoothing of the surface of sexual violence as a process of what she calls 'damage limitation'. In a recent post on Ahmed's blog – "Feminist Killjoys" – she speaks of institutional diversity policies as damage limitation, which Ahmed (2019b, n.p.) defines as "the activity of limiting or containing the effect of an accident or error". Racism in the academic institution, for Ahmed (2019b), is seen as incidental, and diversity is an attempt to present "the best image" possible in order to limit the damage done to the institution itself. We can think of smoothing the surface of sexual violence in a similar way, that is, sexual violence is often seen as incidental, and exceptional. It is exceptional because it is viewed as something that is amiss from the usual operating of things, rather than being ingrained in those operations. When, as a little girl growing up, I was told by parents and older relatives that the abuse I was experiencing by the boys at school was 'because they fancied me', they were – Ahmed (2019b, n.p.) would say – "fix[ing] a leak, treating the leak as the problem". Covering over the encounters, and presenting everything as 'alright, really' *is* the limiting of damage. However, I argue that the damage being limited is not the damage being done to a perceived institution such as the patriarchy. My elders' implicit sexism was precisely that – implicit and ignorant. I am keen to avoid ideas of sexism as *only* a structural force because I do not seek to uncover, or reveal, a supposed truth about The World. The way I conceive of damage limitation is not as something that originates from an identifiable, intentional source. It is not a shorthand term with which to point a finger at a totalised system with appointed subjects who are responsible for the existence of violence (Stewart 2007, 1). Instead, 'damage limitation' is something that emanates from all of the thick, connected fabric of the social – from all of the happening non-happenings, and from all of the actualised moments of expression. It is a term that brings into clearer view the smoothing of the surface of violence. In smoothing the surface, the damage that is limited is the damage done to perceptions of

sexual violence as external to ordinary surroundings – as something that is extraordinary and happens 'out there', and not 'in here'.

Practices of damage limitation materialise in the kind of lingering gestures, phrases, and conversations that I have talked about having experienced. Laura Bates' "The Everyday Sexism Project" – is a rich, online catalogue of violent instances that have been submitted by individuals from all over the world, and they are revealing of how prolific these practices are. One contributor discusses how they were consistently groped during the course of an evening at a party by the same individual, and how the violent scene was framed by the adults at the party as nothing more than romantic persistence, calling the two "a cute couple" (Bates 2019a). Another contributor talks about the intrusion of offensive mother-in-law jokes by a male into a social media group populated mostly by women. The reaction by many to the contributor's subsequent complaint rested on occluding the contributor's experience with refrains and assumptions of shared feelings – "why would you be bothered about that?" "He was only joking" (Bates 2019b). In both accounts there is an effort to limit the damage done to the idea of otherwise ordinary scenes as pleasant and non-evental – a smoothing of violence.

Across and between the other entries to the project, it is possible to get a strong sense of the uneven surfacing of trauma. Where some contributors speak explicitly of sexual assault and rape, they narrate their responses and perceived magnitude of the events differently. One submission is particularly complex; the contributor speaks in long, unbroken prose about their abuse which, while unmistakeable, becomes misty at the edges as they ponder both their consent and contempt around and for the two individuals that they are involved with:

> "The 3 of us are watching Little Britain. B. and I have fallen in love, but I'm scared to show it or tell K. K. starts to feel me up, B. gets uncomfortable and leaves. I want to go after him, but K. is on top of me already and I'm not strong enough to push him off of me. He asks me to let him finish, he says he'll be quick. I just lay there and wait until it is over" (Bates 2019c).

The same contributor moves between expressions of affection, hatred, but also pity for the individual "K" who "begged me to let him fuck me one last time" and proceeded to do so even though "I never said yes and was crying all the time" (Bates 2019c). Horrifying, yes, but the account moves at a quiet, matter-of-fact pace in which the contributor appears haunted and confused by their situation. What they make clear, however, is that there is little room for perceiving trauma and violence as incoherent, or uneven in its murky unfolding amongst the usual activity of life. Moments of violence and traumatic sensations are affectively labile – they are liable to change, and they are not necessarily felt the same collectively, even if we might use the same words to describe them (Berlant 2008, 4). Berlant (2011a, 81) says that "at the level of feeling, flooding does not always feel like flooding". What she means here is that trauma is a style of responding to a situation, but it might be encountered as flatness, ambivalence,

or apathy; affect does not bear an *a priori* relation to the emotions that collect in its wake (Berlant 2008, 4). Long Chu (2017, 304) also puts this clearly when she says that affect doesn't resemble the adjoining event, and that the feelings that erupt don't necessarily feel like the feeling that is named (you might feel aroused by feeling scared, for example, or agitated by feeling deflated). This is transmitted, I feel, in the non-sensationalising tone that marks the excerpt I have just discussed, and resonates also with the tone of *Harriet*. Just before this plateau comes to a close and the narrative begins again, it is worth considering what the surface of violence and trauma in *Harriet* looks like. As an imaginative space that is not hindered by practices of smoothing, in *Harriet* the sensation of trauma is permitted to play out in all of its nuances, ebbs, and flows. In the part of the story that follows, Harriet gets much closer to her trauma, and we follow her as she navigates its uneven surface.

Harriet: Part II

The Lido

2007: Monday

So this guy you met. Saint Martins? Sculpture. Like the Pulp song. That's pretty swish. Sitting in the kitchen Cheryl and me. Are you taking the piss? sipping hot tea. No laugh she ha it's just. I've not seen you like this before. Like what? Like, with feelings and stuff. My face ablaze That's not true. Muddling sugar into my cup. It is I've tried so many with so many guys and you just. Ignore them. Not my type mumble. Well, with a flick of ponytail It's nice to hear anyway. She busies with buttering toast and I think about. Telling her. But I stick it like glue to roof of my mouth. What? my gaze caught. Nothing. Anyway, so there's this party on Friday he wants me to go to. Oh? Yeah it's like um some group…invite only. What sort of group? I don't know rack my brains didn't actually. Get detail. It er, it moves around each month. Butter knife clink Grab Your Coat? Yeah that's it. Disparaging huff You'll end up with your skirt up 'round your neck if you aren't careful. From what I hear those parties get pretty sordid. Full of art students who are all weirdos. How do you know, have you been? No shock of course not but I know. Those who have, and they. Well anyway.

You're always so cautious. You don't need to be so cautious. Slight surprise she looks at me and. I realise how snoutish she is. Keen beady eyes and a. Splat nose. Much older than me and always mothering to the point of. Like I need it. What does she know anyway.

Friday

Fast forward to the day of the party and in the afternoon light through his window we. Lovemake. In the waves of the duvet I am spread tongue clacking at this nervous delight of being seen naked by. Him. Who I want. Surprised now that I want. To be seen. This all of me. This glut of me. And he looks with every of his fingers trailing my body like a map lighting up. Rising at the points where I can. The smell of his hair at my chest. He smells like. A dream that I've had or, never had. Something familiar, like I can't live without. Or don't want to. Guiding his shoulders under a hand. Sliding up in the. Space between my legs and it. Feels like maybe it doesn't even matter if I'm. Not there. Because he. Tucks into my skin like he's been hungry for years, and I can only watch and gasp and watch some more. His mouth so full of me. Blindly but with full sight follows my want through every inch to the lightening flash of this. Electric contraction this. That writhes my limbs in shapes that clasp him under, and keep him in.

And in the wake he says with beaded sweat, I am addicted to the taste of you. Coy I recoil, but only a little. Let him. Let him spark this. Sex in me that I never thought I could. That salt kiss now says. It's possible as he and we, prepared this time and thank God save for the awkward condom fumble. And me, still blooming, welcome him in to my warmth. He puts it in this time, with expert precision better than my, stumbling aim. I think how many must he have. Hands braced and more slippery this time or maybe, just easier. I know now. What to do and I hold close and tighten myself against him as he. Lets go but he takes. Not very long this time. His body is going. All apologies he's apologies as he resists and slows but the surge gets away and escapes. Up inside. Did I do something wrong? And he's laughing now no I just fuck I just. It's not your fault, gentle kiss on my neck. You're just, so warm and it feels. So good.

I'm sorry again as he kisses me. I guess things just work a little too well between us. I sigh in agreement not knowing. Actually. The difference between this and. Still basking in our glow he reaches towards the desk and hands over a, mask. Breathe you'll need this for tonight. Trace over its odd contours. Black pitched bones and shallowed eyes. Isn't this a bit, weird? Chuckle it's just a sort of hallmark. Of the parties. You don't have to wear it the whole time although, people do. Why? Cigarette lit. People tend to be huffffff a little looser at these parties. I guess they don't want it getting out. Face turns with gratitude to my silence and It's nothing weird says. Just a place to let go a bit. I flicker strange with excitement and questions I daren't ask. Cheryl in back of my head. At my stiff anticipation responds he with I'm making more of it than I need to. They're just fun, that's all. Cooing confidence and comfort he rises from our delicious languor to Let's eat, what do you fancy?

In this my mirror the afternoon inches past. Full of Him and some Spanish omelette I am left to ready myself for the evening. Naked in the glass for now I look and think. What he sees that I never saw. Unflat stomach, or flattish. Kind of gangly, does he like that? I always thought my body had a curious composition these, knobbled knees and sticky out-elbows. Slightly hunched although I've straightened tried to straighten. My sixteen year old legs had carried confidence but I see now that they had walked in the hardened shape of. You. My twenty year old legs are foal-new and tremble but they learn glorious alone. They drum up now a fervour that strides that he has softened sweetened. To a gallop. This scaled skin that has been stripped back to the raw nerve flesh and I am. Not a hard shape. Anymore. I am a shape that spreads. And now like butter I melt for the night into jeans, shirt…T-shirt no too casual. Shirt. My butter-limbs look better in a shirt. Ping what's that Meet u outside 9pm? I flutter read. Steady the readying upwards now with mascara no lipstick and a shot, or three. Grand Marnier. Just to ease the hand. And this the mask. Only an eye-mask, really. Bare at the chin and elastic back. Practice a smile that's natural and says. Not too much. But here I am nonetheless.

I'm glad you're coming. He peers out from smart lapels. Parrot I too. It's real. I really am. A small starter line sniff in the shelter and that satisfying smoke drag. Conceal my stomach going 'round in

circles. We take in a strange silence and sense that it might not be like this again, but. It'll do to try. Walk in time across the squelch field grass pricking at ankles with the lights of the lido calling from the close distance. Peaceful trudge to a beckoning mayhem. Bricks creeping nearer. Feel that fuzz curdle up in my veins with mask in hand, and firm the pace. Head up, and firm the pace. Closing in on our approach to a tall figure wrapped in black who Invites please, and dutifully hand. Then. Pause to my right a girl a woman a someone stooped in the mud-sand, back against the wall. Careful hand scrawling a. Name or. Word. I. Not sure but cursive letters spelling slowly and. Before I can ask She has no face and I'm tugged inside.

The lido. Not like I've ever seen it. Like no one was ever here. But I have. Been here, once maybe twice in the innocent sunlight busy with Hackney families on a Saturday afternoon. Now dimmed lights shadowing those pool time notices, children poster smiles and a ghosted reception. Think to that woman, that. Ripple reflection streaks the ceiling and a chlorine smell that chills me. Here. He says Take this but one at a time, this dusty baggy with small blues inside. Heart shape embellish. My body becomes a basket for the evening. Thanks and peer through the door window. Muffled, A World. Steaming expanse of bodies lining the poolside and drawn over deckchairs. Masks on and, Shall we? Quick kiss and a slap on the arse to lighten this, oddly serious. Oi, cheek say. Meet eyes. Meet my eyes. Please. Preliminary panic. Safe behind here. But doors fling wide open and pressure, like the lid off a cooker, release.

He ahead of me with a virile step I shy behind his shoulder and sneaky peek out. In the corner the herd are there. His herd. That Irish tongue again coos and their come-hither hands call him by his name. Completely caned they already are and much more glamorous than I in my tattered jeans against their glossed stilettos and feathers. A drink for me a drink for him and a delicate lilt she says It's nice to see you again. A bit. Two-dimensional. By this point though I can hardly care as my vision starts to marble. Take a second for this music to do its vibrating osmosis in through fingernails and up to my tongue that lulls It's delightful to see you too. Less conviction there. Watch for a while a goldfish bowl of distorted looking, this warped this. Ah. They wrap as always around him engulfed these women I don't. Stand a chance. In any case I am now. Buzzing. Humming like a fridge. With an itch to move but I only stay. A statue here. No, much to explore so push it. Magpie enthralled by the glitter. Speak say I think I might…have a look around. I think I might have a look around, now out loud. Ok says he with mild concern but. In honesty not much resistance. We hope you have a good time tittering chorus we hope you enjoy it in the background. Twiddle straw. Watch myself with this bravery I've borrowed to break that frozen step. His eyes through my back as I leave. To spite myself or to spite him or not to spite anyone I walk away. I slip. Into the swell.

Only three or four feet further and it's difficult to make out where he is, or was. Was this a mistake? The evening is in two colours. Blue. The up is black with stars lining an October chill. Back down to the warm sweat of the tiles and the scale that trickles to the pool edge. Bracketed by chatter and the first

I prick up to is. Are. Three mouths and hidden eyes. She was a real live-wire from mouth one. Mouths two and three draw towards the orbit of description. Perky tits and perfect arse. Ha ha ha. Chewing lip now move past that and their cackling. Into a pickling thick of bodies marked by slight gaps, little recesses for me to shuffle through. The night is young but the. Atmosphere feels matured. Well-rehearsed. The people here they move together. Perfect choreograph of touches and smiles, and I seem the only one who is strange. A thorn. And alone as a thorn I realise that. I am free to, brace and apart from the groups. Suck up a pill, turn in to the lights. And dance. With my thorny self. That self flipped inside out, from the riot. Hands pushing whipping air up and around. Now spin, and stamp. Hard as you can say. Jump. High as you can. Cancel everything out save for the. Beat. Thump. Beat. Now. Beat. There is. Beat. A man. Spin. And spin again. To one two three four of him, this. This kaleidoscope man with red and yellow mask has noticed my. Aloneness. Mulls me over a thought and a drink. Twines around. Wonders at my gawky two-step. What beautiful scenery this he says from behind that red yellow. More! Punctures my fun. My feet suddenly furtive. Judder to a quiet halt as More! shouts he. That's a shame, why stop? I'm going to get a drink. Don't run. Please. Not all men hurt girls his defences ring. Prematurely because I never actually said. Did you hear that. Not all men. I only want a dance. He at my objection firms a grip around my wrist. One dance. The floor becomes a lair and the red yellow closers to my black. Quick glance at the anonymous crowd for. Not all men hurt girls. Help.

The lair starts to sing a familiar song. Not the Ella Fitzgerald but the, other. *Summertime and the livin's easy.* Wakes me back to him, but. I know things about you, says this. The kaleidoscope man. Between the lines. *Me and my girl we got this relationship.* How do you know what about me? Think, dart back he doesn't know about. You. He cannot know about. You. I can smell it on your skin as he. Grabs me by the gasp, and. This is enough, I must. Be out. But before I can out a hand comes in and must be an angel pulls. Wotcha. *Evil, I've come to tell you that she's evil, most definitely.* A tussle of fingers around my waist hoists me from the clinch to protests of Bitch, fucking bitch and squealing retreats backwards to the fray. As he's swallowed by the crowd I hear Everyone's usually pretty friendly but you still have to be careful here. The scolding voice dissipates the moment. Like the flow of vomit down a drain. Not all of it disappears. I am usually careful I say checking over shoulder and flinching at my rank hypocrisy. Looking for the voice. Eyes all around now. I am a well visible thorn. Stumble Whoopsie! you've had a lot already, here sit. Water handed. Are you here with anyone? Um, well, vague gesturing to Where was he again? No, I. Alone. Sympathetic cluck and is backed up by five six seven standing tall above. You can party with us. If you want. And a face moves in to view now. The voice has lips, and a pale nose. Shadowed eyes under a brown peak and blonde hair trailing. By the cool of her smile I say yes.

Harriet. It's Harriet. Third tequila gulp. That's a name you don't often hear. Ha-rri-et rolls it off a long tongue. Tickles. Calm slides down my back as I watch these girls these. Women. Raptured by their confidence and I'm all rippling blood everywhere. I've landed mid-way in their evening and my

induction is to move with them on this dancefloor where it's no longer a case of being alone and no sight of the kaleidoscope man just. Me. And them. These giants. Whoever they. Keep me nestled within them, a flock. The voice keeps me extra close. I can tell you're new to these parties as she ups and downs on her toes, Stick with me and move your hips. I obey up against and the thrill of her goes down right down to that. Belly button flickering. Here, girls, over here! calls me back to the moment. Let's get in the pool, with glee. Few whinges about My makeup and No bikini. No, don't be boring, down to your kecks then, let's go! Surely this was the plan all along as I dumbly follow and marvel at. Unzipping zips. Flick heels off. Help me with this I can never get out of, thanks. Raucous laughter and I'm still clothed. A voyeur at this spectacle of lace and shivering skin. Thinking it's going to be really cold but the voice sees that I've not joined and Harriet! Come on!

Want to please want to impress start thumbing around with buttons. Not quick enough though because she over me stands Arms up! and my shirt is snatched away. Wriggle jeans off, But keep those knickers on dear let's not go all out she wink says. Turns her back and dives in to the blue. Shrilling and shrieking the others go too. Harriet screech Harriet, they siren call. And now the crowd can see it all. It catches like flu. Tugging at ties. Rattling belts. Crawling feet forward closer to mine perched on the edge. Turn and lower just to escape their advance. Secretly sink like one of those, bricks you'd dive for in class. Serene. Open eyes to that chemical sting, and flickering legs above. Back flat at the tile and I, my head rush, blood rush going fast towards a new. Thump-thump. Now. Thump-thump from the inside. This ornery thump-thump of mine wants to stay. Down in the down. Gaze at the sparkle up, and keep limbs still in the down. Stay sunk awhile for the quiet. But this here this is just a tempting of. Is it fate. What's it like, to merge in with the down. Don't get to thinking that, just up now. Before, way before, that retching swallowing can take its hold my will rises me helium up, so that the night can continue. See? For fun. And the down can stay, for another day. Inhale sharp and exhale splutter I bob. Like a buoy on my back afloat to the glee of these, the women who howling, didn't even notice anyway I don't think. But now they wrap me up in them with their game of chase and splash and I'm quickly back to rush with feeling this excitement, this new. This awakening. My awakening. Skin on skin that rubs so good. Rubs off the numbing, rubs me awake. Off the hibernation that I have been. So asleep. Within, and under. For so long now. Like a misty dream, sleep. Under love hands that kept me so. Cut dead the cord of this former me for now. I am charged. Fully charged this battery me. Where is he? Because I want to show. That I am the sunlight, and I glow.

And with this glow I turn to the end of the pool and spy. The herd are coming. Headed by he, my frantic waving I can see This way this way! They pour in to the water. A body after another after another. Shedding clothes and wading through. Not afraid this time though. Not cowering before their beautiful bodies. Their beautiful bodies mean nothing to me. Nose above water I watch through the mask as he crocodile creeps. Hear the voice yell Everyone get in! as she whoops and spirals, welcomes the herd. This electric tingle and sparks as. Gets closer and connects his with mine. Laments, I didn't expect you

to be gone so long. My lame protest I, I, I, But look I'm here now. Shiny now. So proud and new. Surrounded by chlorine flesh. So much flesh in that. Crinkle up your raisin skin. Scoop water over each other because it's funny and draw closer to the middle where we. Riotous we. Press up against and other bodies. Stranger bodies. With new rhythms. All bits and pieces we. Mouths. Lurching together. Blindly following. An orderly march for. Pleasure. With rubbing, that rubbing. Yes. Rub me to the bone. That brings me up to fast breath and lungs fill. Up and down with the waves, with hands that caress. Pressure. My thump-thump shaking through arms and legs. Quivering outwards. And wet all the way through. In the freak of the moment I imagine say, or say This. Over the music over the screeching say This. Here girls. This is a free. This is a freeing of me. My cunt. This is a freeing of my cunt, I. Head back gulp. A cleansing. A baptism of. A baptism by, fingers. Give thanks, to this. Up against the back of a slippery stranger a white hot joy races up inside as I am. Carved out. Flooding through, to. Come. I am coming. Through my mouth through my eyes, and through my. That throbbing release. And with that release open eyes to see. Not more pleasure but a horror surprise. A scream. He screams. I scream. We all scream.

At this, the. There is. The woman with no face. Dead still in the still blue, now. Listening for a shift. Where none will come. Lifeless she, with shimmering skin and wandering hair. Eyes down to the down. Floating heavy with clothes all around. Billowing. Swollen lungs her body is done. Blood steals from a shock in her head. Little opening behind an ear from, a fall? Meanders towards me in curls and spirals. Little crests of red. Does anyone, think. Does anyone know this woman? This woman who, in the dirt outside was scratching and who now. Breathes water. No one calls, though. No one calls for her. No familiar stirs. Just a frantic silence which breaks and. The stampede begins. The sirens. The voice. The herd. Him. Scrabbling and kicking and. All that fun is gone now. It's a shame. They all frenzy their way out. Collecting clothes and screams and, standing all over each other. It's a drove of fear. Left is pink water and this drifting she. And me. At this her quiet funeral. Strange how it works I always wanted to see a dead body, actually. I think this, in the rousing after of orgasm. This is what death looks like. Her mask floating at the gurgling filter. Gentle lapping. Fingers pointing to both deep and shallow. I stride to take a look, wading through to her. Freshly gone. It's a strangely halcyon dead.

Before I can reach, A drowned body stinks and weighs a tonne, did you know that? Voice interrupt behind me asks. Or states. The kaleidoscope man again. Standing in the shadow. Not yet she doesn't. But she will, you'll see. And he laughs all the way out of the door.

Hoist myself from this membrane wet, her lido tomb. Mourning resignation that the night is done. Slight jealousy that she stole my fun. Leave her to watery peace and dress in the silence. Out myself to the cold to stare in the dark. With hair slicked and alcohol breath. Blues and twos coming fast, no doubt to find. Think what it must be to be so sogging and dead. Like that mother dead. But What a night, I thrill. What a night to feel for the first time, life. A life. Stand swaying to music that's stopped but wish it

hadn't. To be sogging and dead is heavy, and it's a pity. But tonight was featherlight and I want to go back. A feather freeing that felt so feather good. A freeing from this, why does it have to end? My mouth opens, and it escapes from me. In one breath. Goodbye pleasure relinquish. I must back to the ground. Where I am heavy to crawl. Crippling heavy. Corpse heavy. But I want. To be always out from under this heavy. That would be a lovely new. I want to be out from under this heavy. From your heavy, from you. From you that told me love but. Stitched me. Pinned me. Spread me. Like shit, you fucked. My fuck up to the. Throat. With flat palming and that. Thing. The thing. Up to the hilt you came for, in me and now. Anger now because you stopped me from that feather freeing. That free that the herd, the voice, the sirens have always had free. And that I have only sampled. So now. I come for you. I will come for you. I will wash it you out. Like snot. Like phlegm. I will hock it out. Clear you out from my lungs and scratch you from my skin. Smack I'm bang rubbing not that nice rubbing but rubbing mad at my. Screeeeeeeeee. Claw my face with these nails that touched. That inched towards. The dead. But these mine are nails that want to be rid. Hunkered down now over my feet I scratch this freedom that I want into the dirt. I scratch Tommy into the dirt. Tommy. Tommy.

Harriet. Who says Harriet? The darkness says Harriet. He emerges all teeth and eyes and says Harriet, where were you? My snarl to hide and. What a sight I am. Mud and wet and. Slight blood. What are you doing? Stand and straighten up to a lamppost. We've called the police they're, they're coming now. We have to stay. Some have run off but, the party you see it wasn't exactly legal but, we can't leave. We have to talk to the police. One two steps backwards. Harriet, where are you going? Take in his pitying or pitiful face and think how much he has given me. This little monster me that he's not seen. I can't I. What can't, why can't? Harriet. His skin beautiful now with a beaded anxiety. One second want to throw it all and cling. Hands around my shoulders clasp. But. Off now, I've gone off now. You see? Like, an egg or. Some milk. You can't have gone off things. It's the truth. Things gone bad will make you bad, too. What are you talking about? You aren't making any sense. Slide away now from those hands, any hands really. Harriet talk to me, it's the drink and the shock, come on. Sit. But I flip expert underarm, and away. I'm sorry, to him silently. I'm sorry I can't stay. In the last of this he says he shouts after Something isn't right Harriet, I've known it from the beginning. Where are you going? I manage to muster, I'll text! I will. I will. I'll text. Knowing that I won't. I won't text.

Stumble amble in with through the dark. We all lie alone anyway. It's mine to be alone now, and I'm off to change the world.

Saturday: 5:10 a.m.

Swimming. Swimming through all that chlorine towards you. Back towards where I baby grew. Travelling out now. Out from the Big Smoke. Early people on here, nodding heads gently on the window panes. That relaxed, stifled air that is stop stuck. The drunk dribbling into paper bag. Ears

ringing with the ghost of the party. Let these flutter eyelids go and the. Black zipping by. Streaked lights, and my father sits before me. On that chair there. In with the McDonalds wrappers. His ashen face looks at or through. Nurses a tin. Chugger-chugger goes behind. Soft. Chugger-chugger. Unpick now the stitches out of my mouth. Dad. Daddy. Take these stitches out of my mouth. Scratch mouth that itch. Daddy. But you're in conversation with a face that moves flicks, turns to me but moves flicks. Back to me that face I cannot see. I am waving now See me Daddy. I'm right here. I'm just here tap knock-knock on the table slam-slam at the window. Lurch and swipe but right through it goes. Unfazed. Fingers in my ears now eyes closed to fa-la-la-la wish this away. Open to the same. That ringing is louder, searing. Eyes shift, over my shoulder. Nearly see me now he can nearly surely see me now.

Harriet, your grades are falling. What? You aren't paying attention at school. These words these, from nowhere come. From all around. Your education is important scold. His that Daddy mouth opens now and reeks this foul. Not listening. Silent now, tongue stuck to that tin. Will his mouth to open open open but, comfort stays quietly in the corner. Bend my ear and still can't hear. Daddy I need to tell you. Daddy I need to tell you that I've been locked up in a room for a very long time. But now I've found what makes me go hot zing shivery and I've come back to tell you that I'm. Free. If you could look at me for just one second. And let me tell you how I'm free. Let's not talk about school. But he's back in conversation with that face that moves flicks.

And I'm dancing now, hopping up and down. Daddy you need to look listen I've got to tell you show you, you don't care but I've got to tell. Before my skin bursts explodes all over. I want to show you stand. I stand. Look here it's a dirty. It's a clean. It's a dirty clean secret. Ha! It's under my, look. It's my brother it's your. Tommy. Stand. To lift my skirt and out from between, there, a scream. My brother is under my skirt. My brother is hiding under my skirt. My brother is. My brother is. My brother is fucking me under my skirt.

Rumble rising, a belching bile rise. Retch and hock my bloodshot eyes. Ding and at the platform stops. Jolt me my face down in the chair. Tongue dry and Dad is gone. There is just me. And this vomit. Vomitous me. To home. It's to home now to show and share.

7:00 a.m.

The smell here is different. Air is damper fresher without that thick choke smoke. Search of mouthwash wet wipes. Clean up and walk. Grab a bottle from the corner shop. Pavement cracks the same floor is lava, follow a trail, clunk-clunk the railings like I used and gaze up and in at big houses moving by. There the school. Sticks out a mile. Playground sprawling poking. Poking fun at me. Teasing me they those girls with. Saying that. Saying what I was doing with that. She lets him cram his fingers up her fuck they'd say. They'd say but they didn't. Know. In that sprawling playground evenings they'd up me in the corner and ask. Why do you let him? How do you do it? Is it because. You're a slut. C'mon

Harriet! Mmmmnn, mmmnnn. Speak up Harriet. Thpeak up. Thlut. As I'd crumple paper down to the weeds and the slugs and Leave me please, just leave me be.

The graveyard. Where my mother lives although. I've never had a mother. Past all the stones writing on Beloved this and Beloved that, some with flowers. Wonder slight where the woman with no face is now. Mum's grave is hidden behind a wall where it's less busy. Dad wanted it that way. Spreading moss on the stone all over and the. Picture is bleached from the sun. Curly hair not at all like mine. Maybe she wasn't even anyway. Such sweet family they'd say though I, never knew. Never had a chance because she. Never wanted to meet me. Mum. I'll sit down here because I've come not for answers but to show and tell. I've come to tell you that I don't want to be dead in the down like you. I've come to tell you before I go to them. Grew up with everyone thinking I'm lazy and slow. Did you know I couldn't speak properly until very late? Numbing my syllables. There's something awful in that. Something not quite ok. You weren't there to tip the world the right way up. You walked right off the edge and I had to do it all myself, and it was tiring, you see? Learning how to grow. Speaking just wasn't that important. Did you know how you left me? It wasn't easy. You probably don't want to hear this, but you left me. To men. To men that didn't, that couldn't. Know how to care. You left me to my brother. Chewing on me. Chewing on my flesh. You left to become stink and heavy in the silt. Your balloon body without care and reeking of death. In the beginning, Dad was pretty fierce. Always eyes peeled. Busy sorting out all the trouble with school. But he faded. He faded. Into a beer bottle. Stopped caring or. Ran out of energy. Or something. He was always out or pretending to be out. Left me clacking stones out in the garden alone. And that's when it began.

Did you make him go to the doctor? I heard they said there was nothing wrong. He'll grow out of it. He'll grow out of it Dad said, with the telly on so loud downstairs he couldn't hear him. Waiting outside my bedroom door. Waiting to get in and fill me up to my eyeballs.

I've come to tell you today that things are different now. I'm on a journey. I'm going to tell them that I'm different. I met a man that showed me love. What love looks and feels and smells like. It's very different. I have been learning about the things that my body can do. I met some friends that showed me how nice it is to move up against each other. I've learned if you move in the right way then my body opens like a flower. I've learned to masturbate although I'm not very good at it yet. I'm still practicing. My alien body. I have learned that I can exist in the darkness, and that I can be. I think that I'll go back to school perhaps. Finish it off with better grades. Get a good job. Maybe I will meet someone that I can stay with. And we can learn more about love. I want to grow old. I don't want to be dead in the down. So I won't be coming here again. Standing wiping grass off my knees. I won't come here again, Mum. I've come today to tell you goodbye.

The quiet behind me as I walk is a pressure that pushes on the back of my head and tries to. Kick out the back of my knees. Clawing all over for me to stay. But let it go as I walk away. To the house now, to home.

8:30 a.m.

It sits under a sky. The walls. The roof. Dull yolky yellow waiting for the rain. Three winding streets down from the graveyard. It begins. Air is still can hear the clatter yelling of children. Leaves on the ground judder. Here I am. Back to where I am not new. Old. Worn through. Worn out. Traipsing up the overgrown garden. Paused in front of the door. Brrring. Wait. Through the glass he sees me. Dad. Frosted features, but it's him. Creak the door open to a jaw that's on the floor. Harriet he crackle says with a croak. Wilting in front of me. My little girl. I'm quickly in his arms with the smell of dust and whiskey. Come in come in. My darling girl. Like I'd never been gone. Let me look at you. Do a twirl. Into the living room and he against the door frame knocks. One foot in front of the other. In a less than straight line.

Not much small talk just eyes on mine. His frame now frail, smaller. Than I remember. Weak into the sofa with hand on a glass. Mutters I knew you'd come home. Did you? Yes. You had a. A good life here. Slurs. We love you. Protest You let me at sixteen go. There was no keeping you, like your mother you. Slight bitter for she and or me. Do what and when you want. Wait out the awkward silence on this tired chair. Acrid smell seeps through the wallpaper green. Where are you now, in Hackney? Yes. Do you like it there? Yes. Shuffling feet on the newspapered floor. What a mess. Sitting me across from my father I never thought I would.

Dad, look, can we. Cut across. I came here for a reason. Are you coming back for good? No. That echoes. I came back to tell you something. Takes a swig and a gulp. Over his shoulder the pantry door is shut. Is he here? Who? Say his, say it. Tommy. Pump blood to my mouth. Taste still of sick. He's unwell. Smokey voice now. He's unwell and, and in bed. The clock labours forward. Sad that he still lives. At home. I'm not coming home, Dad. I've come to tell you that. What? Pity stricken. Just a little. His chequered shirt and tattered jeans. I've come to tell you Dad that you. You should know about him. On your conscience badly this will sit. And I will. Enjoy. You failed. As a father, you failed. Hold still enough and I can. See the cracking in his face. Dumb blind confusion. What. Failed, what? desperation asks. You must, you must know. You must be wallowing in it. Wallowing in the crevasse of it.

Take pleasure in this. This pause between now and the destroying. I am with him in his grief. Nee-naw siren outside. Say it now. Feel the words come gushing spewing exorcism out. No more with that gentle intention, just out it out. Dad. Tommy waited for me. You need to know that Tommy waited for me. Folded into the creases of my life. Under your plain sight he was. And I was there invisible me but you stopped. Seeing me. At some point you stopped. Looking. You were looking instead too far. To the lake

where she, where the sodden mud lies. Your Madeleine. Times. There were times I thought I was going to die. Ignore the I don't understands and bask in the words that disable. I'm all on it now. Like a chicken he gutted me and called it love. No. Fingers through the bannisters all Harriet, Harriet cooing open your door. No. Yes. Dad, yes. And you were the one to let him roam with his groin so low to graze like cattle on me. No no no, he yo-yos. No. No. He was. Troubled. I always babble always knew he was. Bad. Apple bad. Babble bad. But not a. Not that. No. Hands wringing glass and gripping cushion. His eyes, back to that. Not able to look. Flicks this way and. I'm not here. Skirts skits around. Oh me. Oh my. Oh my brother I used to think, he loves with his puts his in. He loves me. Keep talking. Daily, nightly our. Little hidey spot. I loved him because he told. He told with hitting and pushing and drawling in my ear Harriet get on your. Fucking knees. And the fucking. In this, the house and you Dad. You were too gone by this point to. Even notice. Here where I was touched. Ripped and fucked. My bare thighs with brother come. Left this rotting torn between my legs. My knickers with blood. My faltering step. My suddenly entrance as a. Woman. That family flesh. His animal shrieks. Bubble and spit Dad, retching his drink.

Absorb this frantic swell of mood as my father, writhing on the floor. Clutching his. Chest. That glass shattered now. No stir from the pantry. Harriet, please. Out on a sea of grief I paddle. Upwards. Upstream. With this disdain I talk and feel. A lifting. A floating into the middle distance. Hovering watching this scene as Dad he folds, origami into. Something wretched. Wriggles like spineless. My skin tingles with lightness. Above this, at the top of the room. This unbolting. That ceiling is wide and that ceiling is me. Giant now I bloat with his despair. Let it fill me up with the deepest cold of the past. Let me in. Let me at him. Let me in. Let me at him. Voice deep bigger now. Let me in. He's splutter unwell. In bed. Such defence. In the face of all this there's still defence. Gasping Dad say I did my. I did my best. Help. Churning up from the murk his yellowed eyes. He fit and twitch. That whiskey foam around his lips. As far I am far from the floor. He fits and it. Strips my pain away. Gone away. From me. Take this thing away. Take that body say. Punch legs arms out to. Help him on his way. Struggle down. Go down now to the down. With her down.

Go there, give it up. No father, you. Not now. It is done.

And now I am down. Back down on the ground. Let out a breath that seems to. Go on for. All time. Quietly step over his shivering bones, and to the pantry door. Turn the handle. By 11:00 a.m. I am done.

Epilogue

As the project draws towards something of a close, this epilogue provides an opportunity to take stock of a complex writing process that has taken several years now. Throughout the plateaus of this work I have deliberated over the possibility of and limitations to defining trauma in any way whatsoever. The event and sensation of trauma, I have argued, is enigmatic, elusive, singular, and its singularity is not adequately addressed in clinical or even many theoretical settings (Stevens 2009, 2). This brings forward the question of how relevant the term 'trauma' might be at all, and if it can be put to work in any way that is helpful. I have critiqued other scholars such as Judith Herman for their efforts to multiply the symptoms that come to count as 'traumatic' in order to better account for trauma's more persistent and chronic effects, because I felt that expanding the existing framework by *n* is still too containing of something that cannot, really, be located or specified. However, I still continue to use the term 'trauma' myself, as if I know better what it describes. What I suggest is that I *do* know what trauma describes, but only in a way that is specific to my experience, and as I feel it. Critically, that specificity extends to every/any other body that might feel traumatised. The implication of this is that it is not possible to grasp at a stable perspective on trauma, but that does not at all mean that it is no longer worth theorising trauma. The trauma culture that I would like to see emerge is one that would be sensitive to its elasticity and idiosyncrasies, with that sensitivity becoming precisely the enabler of 'trauma' as a common language. In other words, it should be possible to speak trauma between and across each other without trying to fold it into a universal idea – as if that were the only way of making it understandable to everyone.

This project has been an effort to make inroads towards such an approach. I said at the very beginning that I was intending to provide a sort of 'how-to' for trauma without being instructive, thereby lifting pressure from the idea that there is a right or wrong way to navigate it. And what I have written has truly been a thought and practice-based experiment on that ethos, because I didn't really know at first how to do it myself, either. The process of writing has been one of approaching my own trauma in many ways, really, for the first time. All of the plateaus, though connected to each other, read like parts that move as I, too, have moved through them. When I started writing the full plateaus back in January, I had a fierce feminist zeal firing up in my belly. As the months wore on, however, that zeal wore off, and I felt as though I was sinking in to the depths of my trauma like a stone. The stress that this has placed upon my body, and upon those closest to me, has been enormous. What I realise is that the process of writing has stripped away a lot of what I thought I could see about myself, and my trauma. I have up until this point been more accommodating than I'd like to admit of cultural registers that place me as responsible for my abuse. It is difficult not to let those things in when they are, after all, so prevalent. I have also spent a lot of time trying to squeeze myself into the model of C/PTSD and

concluding that perhaps, because I didn't seem to fit into its shape, that I must not be traumatised after all – that I must have got away with it somehow. However, after this long meditation, I have – like the floating narrator in *Harriet* – become increasingly sensitive to the signs of trauma as they emerge through encounters, and I have tried to reduce my urge to filter them through the existing literature just to try and get satiation from an explanatory fix. It is hard, though, to truly feel your way through trauma via sensation alone without collapsing into that pattern. It is very difficult to detach from thinking of trauma as pathological, and from thinking of your traumatised body as a deviation from health. And, because it is difficult to do those things, it is easy to feel compelled and under pressure to 'get better' – to get as quickly as possible on to the 'right' side of the normal/abnormal dichotomy.

I was in conversation the other day with a good friend who is an incest survivor, and she was talking about what it means to her to be 'broken', and how this 'brokenness' guides both her daily and long-term choices about the direction in which she wants her life to go. She sounded a little resigned to 'being broken' as a fact, but it got me thinking about how such a self-described state could be thought otherwise, that is, outside of pathologising frames. If anything, it is the imperative to 'be happy' (or 'be less broken'), that has made me thoroughly miserable. It has led me towards toxic patterns of thinking – a crumbling of belief in my capabilities and dwindling confidence in my physical appearance, and a desperation for a rewind button that would allow me to go back (and make 'better' choices, do 'better' at school, be nicer to my parents) so that I might have avoided my abuse and, consequently, have arrived at this point in my life 'happier'. Sara Ahmed (2010, 11) writes that certain bodies are always already marked as unhappy because they do not "flow" with the specific ways of living that are thought to promote happiness. It is at this point that she identifies the similarity between happiness and privilege. Her discussed figures of the feminist killjoy, the unhappy queer, the angry black woman, and the melancholic migrant, are bodies that are seen as necessarily unhappy because they fail to inhabit, or be proximate to, the normative objects that are seen as indicators of happiness – to be white, to be heterosexual, and so on (Ahmed 2010, 90).

Following this line of thought, survivors of sexual violence are also marked as unhappy. That is, at least, until they get on the path to 'healing' that I critiqued in *Writing a Body of Trauma.* Failure to align with that path, as I have discussed, is a resistance, and means being encountered as resistant – and consequently remaining unhappy. Because trauma is viewed in a problem-requires-treatment formula, it seems completely outlandish (or 'wilful', as Ahmed would describe it) to not jump straight on board with any techniques offered to help in 'feeling better'. But the problem, as I have previously stated, is that that such techniques assume to know in advance what happiness looks like, in order to know how to reach it. Taking a lead from Ahmed, what I suggest is that it might be possible for survivors of sexual violence to be happy even (or especially) if that happiness doesn't look like its normative and self-evident iterations. It might be possible, I think, to carve out a new happiness within the interstices of what everyone else *thinks* is happiness. This resonates with Ann Cvetkovich's (2003, 90) welcoming

of lesbianism as a causal consequence of surviving incest because, as she identifies, denying the link between the two only serves to suggest that there is something wrong with being gay after all. To return to my friend's 'brokenness', what would it mean to look at it another way, and to move with it, rather than try to move away from it? To stay with being 'broken' might give her permission to shape her life around her trauma, to find a space for it and to accept – even welcome – that it will always to a certain extent be determinative of who she is. What this does is push against the seeming feverish need to create distance between trauma and the body in order to move towards a point of recovery that is indeterminable, but is believed in nonetheless.

Fundamentally, that is the problem with talking about 'healing', and reaching 'happiness': the point of recovery – though indeterminable – is taken, like trauma itself, as a universal that is felt the same and can be reached in the same way by everybody. What I will describe in the following section as 'therapeutic culture' is nauseatingly pressuring, and it especially occludes from consideration how the intersections of race, gender and sexuality, and ability affect how trauma is navigated. This is a frustration of mine that has been building throughout the writing of this project, and that I have discussed in parts but wish I had spent more time with. In my experience, I have been left violently lurching towards 'happiness', trying to reach it, only to find that it is a false crescent. I want to be able to stop, and to feel through the sensations of trauma as I go, on my own terms and without, as much as is possible, knowing what I am looking for in advance. What I do in the next section is hesitate before the imperative to heal and reach happiness. This is not because I don't *want* to feel better, but because I want to think about what the cultural compositions of healing and happiness mean, and for who. Most significantly I argue a case for healing that is disconnected from the 'forward' movement that appears characteristic of discourses of happiness and healing which, I claim, are inseparable from Western meritocratic-economic ideals of productivity. This discussion, then, is critical as a point of hesitation that refuses direction in order to forge some relief from the teeth-grinding, sleep-stealing, cruelly optimistic anxiety that comes with viewing trauma as goal-orientated.

The Telos of Happiness and Healing

Reaching through a genealogy of scholarship that critiques the history of 'happiness' as a structure that is associated with social norms (e.g. "the happy housewife", and "domestic bliss"), Sara Ahmed (2010, 3) names the contemporary moment "the happiness turn". What she describes here is an increased popularity of literature and discourse on self-help and therapy which, drawing on different knowledges, are for the most part produced for popular consumption in order to foster 'feeling good' within society, and in turn contributing to the biopolitical imperative of self-improvement of individuals before capitalism (see Foucault [1982] 1997 on "technologies of the self"). Happiness has become a form of capital or, as Ahmed (2010, 4) describes it, "happiness…is the ultimate performance indicator".

Since the publishing of Ahmed's text on the topic, the happiness turn has, for sure, turned more aggressive with the increased influence of social media. The seemingly enduring forms of aphorism and epigram are expressed through memes (as the current mode *du jour*) and are folded into the Instagram pages of influencers who simultaneously present their 'happy' lives through a refined lens of – frequently Orientalist – impressions of yoga, 'clean eating', 'mindfulness', and so on (Coppa 2019, 207; Eberhardinger 2019, n.p.). I am the kind of person that finds these discourses a little sickening anyway, flinching when I walk into a house adorned with aphorism placards because they are inevitably alarmingly tone-deaf to the unequal exposure of bodies to violence and oppression (for example, while it may be easy for the white middle-class household that is well-insulated from the world, it is *not* so easy for a lot of other bodies to simply "live, laugh, and love"). But this culture exists, and it is proliferating (see Seligman 2002 on "authentic happiness"). What is described as "the happiness industry" has been framed by Foucauldian scholars as a practice of governing the self, whereby functionality and productivity is tied to the pursuing and development of one's happiness (see Fabián and Stecher 2017; Binkley 2011; Davies 2015). More specifically – and this is what Ahmed is getting at – the happiness that is idealised takes a very specific shape: happiness is entrepreneurial aspiration complemented by the heteronormative familial structure. Using a phenomenological approach, Ahmed (2010, 4) describes these as "happy objects", and that to be happy is to orientate oneself towards those objects in order to face the "right way" (by being straight, by getting married, by pursuing a career, and so on). To be disruptive of, or to turn away from, these objects (by being queer, by choosing not to have children), is to be seen as unhappy, even if it you don't actually *feel* unhappy.

What I am interested in is how all of this crosses over with discourses of 'healing' that are present in therapeutic culture. By 'therapeutic culture', I refer to not only the more formal institutions and practitioners, but the way that the knowledge from those institutions moves outwards to more popular and public platforms (like Facebook and Instagram) and is filtered through non-technical, colloquial language – such as talking about optimism, and self-care – so that individuals can, in effect, become their own "self-therapists" (Cabanas 2016, 472). My frustration is not to do with any emphasis on feeling better for its own sake – there is nothing wrong with that. My frustration is borne out of the way that 'healing' privileges particular modes of functioning and disregards others, and how it is captured using stock phrases like 'moving on' that mirror neoliberal rhetoric. Like the way that trauma is theorised, the concept of healing in this context is universalising – it assumes to know in advance what will improve well-being, and it places those assumptions into an urgent forward movement, an *expectation* that you *will* get there (wherever 'there' is). In my experience, the expectation or *telos* of healing is hugely pressurising and determinative of a point-to-point journey from 'brokenness' to 'healed'. In positive psychology, recuperation from trauma is even termed post-traumatic "growth" (see Tedeschi *et al* [1998] 2009, also Joseph and Linley 2008). It describes a certain track of development, as if trauma is a path to be travelled linearly, and it reinforces the idea of trauma as pathology – as

something that should be sought to create distance from. The study of trauma within positive psychology is particularly instructive in how to 'heal' because it is predicated on a prescriptive theoretical framework: Fabián and Stecher (2017, 602) write that the approach of positive psychology is to work on drawing out the internal happiness an individual is believed to already have, intrinsically. The way that this is employed is to work on recognising the happiness that is already there so as to reduce the perceived negativity of external circumstances (this can be colloquially recapitulated as a "it's not what happens to you, it's how you look at it" sort of thing). When applied to trauma, this approach focuses on the potential 'positive' outcomes of trauma, rather than the 'negatives' in order to recuperate (Ulloa *et al* 2016, 288). This is an enormously simplistic outlook, and is seriously eliminating of how trauma is crossed by the numerous specificities of experience. It also assumes to know what constitutes 'positive' and 'negative', and it is this assumption that has caused positive psychology (in both its academic and popular iterations) to be placed under the academic critique that I have described, in which it has been identified as synonymous with and dependent upon neoliberal ideas of 'thriving' and 'the good life'.

I argue that the profound sense of dislocation felt by bodies in response to the psychologically universalising and catastrophic event-based model of trauma is made worse by a therapeutic culture that views 'healing' as a technique to reach 'happiness' which is figured both as a measurable result, and a style of composure that is considered appropriate for the reproduction of life. When you are exposed to it, it feels like a tailwind; you are encouraged towards an approximate location somewhere, somewhen in the future which, although vague, is hard not to develop an affective attachment to, and so you start lurching and surging blindly for the 'healed' and 'happy' state which is promised to you so long as you stick to the right path (Ahmed 2010, 9). I explained in the prologue that I have always found the conversation of recovery to be contrived (how would I know when I have 'recovered'?) In both therapeutic and social environments I was subjected to the usual progressive turns of phrases – "fake it till you make it", "keep on keeping on", "one foot in front of the other" – without really knowing what any of them meant, only that they were gesturing towards a vague future in which everything would just *be better*. The onus on forward movement also meant shutting out from consideration all of the bits of my trauma that I wanted to stop and ponder over – the bits that were considered too sharp and jagged for the smooth relief of 'healing'. I would like to see a therapeutic trauma culture that doesn't rush *toward* or look *beyond*, so that it can stop silencing those bits, better enabling trauma to be felt through on individual terms. The sense of rushing characterises the violence of normativity, and it is tiring. It is tiring, Lauren Berlant (2011a, 27-28) writes, because individuals are being worn out by the promises that they have attached to, in which the goalposts keep shifting. What she describes as a "cruel optimism" about fantasies of upward economic and social mobility in a neoliberal environment in which those fantasies are actually unattainable, is reflected in approaches to trauma because 'recovery', 'recuperation', and 'healing' are positioned as fantastical guideposts – fantastical because they are

completely disconnected from how individuals actually adjust over time. There is a cruel optimism, then, in healing. It supports the idea of trauma as something unusual to have happened – something that has slowed you down and de-railed you from the pathway – eclipsing the reality of much trauma which, as Berlant's argument suggests, is a condition of everyday life. Trauma is mostly not an exceptional event, but an ordinary crisis (Coddington and Micieli-Voutsinas 2017, 2).

What I have become increasingly aware of is that Berlant's argument is especially true of bodies for whom exposure and vulnerability to violence is much higher. The normality and frequency of violence for female, black, brown, queer, trans, and differently-abled bodies means that the paradigm of trauma-as-exceptional is particularly injurious to and silencing of their traumatic experiences. There is a significant amount of literature that has critiqued the Eurocentric bias of trauma studies, noting that the event-based model – taken to be universal – is its most exclusive characteristic, and neglects the persistent and quotidian nature of cultural traumas (see Craps 2013; Gibbs 2014; Visser 2011). What is referred to as the 'decolonising of trauma theory' is a literature that focuses its efforts on highlighting how the perceived 'sudden' and locatable aspect of trauma marginalises the cumulative hurt of continuing repression that is endured by bodies experiencing the trauma of colonialism (Andermahr 2015, 9). This scholarship is instrumental to developing a radical re-imagining of sexual trauma because, by arguing for a move away from the dominant paradigm, it opens the conversation up to consider trauma as something that doesn't really have a 'before and after' in relation to a particular event, but is instead something that extends in complex ways through past and present experience. When it comes to healing, I see this body of work as sympathetic to decentring from 'forward' movement, and imperatives to get back on to a productive pathway. It could be argued that the Western bias of trauma theory is matched and supported by the Western meritocratic-economic 'happiness' that I have already discussed, and is directly reflected in therapeutic approaches. The Western bias in trauma theory is, I feel, accurately diagnosed by postcolonial literature as privileging of white suffering, but that does not mean that it adequately accounts for the bodies that it privileges – the white, Western bodies. I do not mean to foreground white experience here, and discount the complicated cultural nuances that race brings to traumatic experience – what I mean is that the dominant paradigm fails most bodies to a more or less degree, and is particularly injurious to minority bodies. Disconnecting from the current model of trauma, then, is necessary not only in a postcolonial context, but in order to better consider how trauma is experienced by all kinds of bodies. Taking all of this into consideration, what I put forward in the next (and final) section are some nascent and fledgling suggestions towards a healing approach that might be a more effective enabler of 'feeling better' for survivors of sexual violence.

Healing Movement

Healing is movement, but it doesn't have to be forward movement. It can be directionless, oscillatory, or dithering. Positioning healing as something to be reached for, or chased after, feels like a sickening head rush. Because an attachment is made to the *expectation* of getting better, it is easy to completely lose sight of what it feels like to actually take care of yourself. Speculatively, I suggest also that the emphasis on 'moving on' in existing healing discourse is contributory to the taboo of sexual violence – the belief that sexual violence happens 'out there', and is not hugely common. If we try to put sexual trauma 'behind' us, what we put behind also is the prevalence of sexual violence. It becomes occluded from view – it is 'behind' the curtain, 'behind' the scenes. In one positive psychology article about recovering from trauma, the authors discuss restoring in trauma victims their belief in safety, having had such belief "temporarily" extinguished by trauma (Ulloa *et al* 2016, 301). This approach is conciliatory to the view that sexual violence is somehow unusual, and that individuals are otherwise ordinarily safe. It also makes an assumption that everyone's exposure to risk is the same as the next person, regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, or ability. What I encourage is an approach to healing that is not only detached from the expectation to reach an elusive point in the future that is representative of capitalist productivity, but is also committed to increasing the visibility of sexual trauma as evidence of sexual violence as widespread. This is not to incite unnecessary fear or suspicion, but instead to ease the pressure on a conversation topic that is still so difficult to have, even between friends. I had to check myself very recently at a party when I overheard a friend make a reference – quite an oblique reference, but a reference nonetheless – to her experiences of abuse to another friend who doesn't know about what happened to her. She was drunk, as we all were, and my surprisingly conservative knee-jerk reaction was to launch into finger-wagging and hushing motions as if 'this' wasn't the time or place. I felt pretty bad, and later questioned myself as to why I was so quick to do that – what constitutes an 'appropriate' space of disclosure? The idea that it is not appropriate to talk openly about sexual violence is not completely without merit – it needs to approached with caution and sensitivity because it is a traumatising topic, and can be upsetting for others. However, there needs to be a distinction between that kind of caution and a censoring that simply serves to inoculate the subject from group discussion. Bringing the topic to the front, or at least making it slightly more accessible in conversation, might make it easier to carve out healing approaches that don't shove sexual trauma into the shadows of a dark past best left behind, and aren't hooked onto a trajectory of a normative future sanitised from exposure to violence.

I am aware of being seen here to naively valorise the therapeutic benefits of speaking out about sexual violence – I have throughout this project discussed the political implications of disclosure and the tendency of mainstream culture, as Cvetkovich (2003, 93) writes, to "turn sexual abuse into a media spectacle", co-opting narratives and reframing survivors within the historical lynchpin of gender

oppression which I have described in previous plateaus as the 'traumatised woman' – a figure who is synonymously vulnerable to and responsible for sexually violent experiences (Bell [1993] 2002, 23). There are limits to the value of speaking out, particularly when the space that is spoken into is one in which the legitimacy of women's claims as victims depends on the utter sanitisation of their own sexuality (Haaken 1994, 124). In the legal domain, the culpability of the perpetrator still rests on evidence of the 'innocent' sexual history of the complainant (Haaken 1994, 140). What I outline here is not a strategy for completely countering this culture in order to aid the more successful adjudication of claims. That is a detailed conversation that needs to be had separately. What I focus on supporting, following Cvetkovich (2003, 94), is a potential re-shaping of therapeutic culture – one which is led by perceiving disclosure not as an attempt at accurately 'telling' a past event, but instead as a performance that can vary depending on context. Speaking out – like the trauma itself – then becomes an ongoing event that is subject to change and adapt, and the witnessing of the speaking becomes a participatory act on the part of the listener rather than being based on an imperative to judge truth or falsity (Haaken 1994, 125).

There is congruity between my desire to disconnect from the paradigm of trauma as an exceptional past event, the cruel optimism of happiness and healing, and the fixation on disclosure as an accurate telling of the past. What it amounts to is a detachment from seemingly self-evident direction or points (in the future, or the past), and an attachment instead to process, and what I describe as directionless movement. I have already described this project as a series of parts that move and it has, in many ways, been directionless. It has been a process, and performance, of moving around my trauma with little sense of which way I will go. Writing *Harriet* was intended as an experiment in how to follow the singular sensations of trauma, and how to detach from the clinical shape of trauma in order to do so. Detaching from that shape involves detaching from prescribed direction. Harriet sits firmly outside of the traditional model of trauma – she follows her nose, not necessarily in an instinctual kind of way, but she navigates the sensations of her trauma as they occur throughout an extended and prolonged present. Her story is not subject to the telos of happiness and healing, and the events of her trauma are not fixed in the past. The act of writing *Harriet* and the surrounding plateaus has definitely left me feeling worse (if I have to put a measure on it) than I did when I started, but that is perhaps the result of having worked so hard to chip off the aspirational sheen of 'healing' in favour of staying with my own 'brokenness', so that I can try and navigate my trauma on my own terms. Feeling worse, at the moment, is a sobering, oscillatory movement that – although difficult – is increasingly separated from the urge to move forward towards any seemingly naturalised happy and healed state, and that itself is refreshing. I'll be glad for the writing to come to an end, but I don't regret at all that it began, and it certainly achieved what it set out to do – which was to use storytelling as a way of provoking feeling.

What I am left with, after all of this work, is a new imperative to heal, one that is directionless and isn't fixed on creating distance from trauma. In my utopian vision of therapeutic practice, the focus would

be on the immanent expression of trauma, rather than trying to move away from it. Throughout this project I have argued that the shape of trauma – the way that it prescribes what the event of trauma is, and how it should feel – eliminates the specificities of traumatic experience as something that is singular. Likewise, health, or feeling good, does not look the same for each body. It is difficult to employ the term 'healing' without invoking the etymological sense of 'restoring to health' as something that is universal to everyone, but discourses of healing are only damaging when they are presented as a one-way, linear trail, and are attached to economic and social agendas. In this project, writing has been a practice-based method of healing outside of those discourses. I am pleased with the monograph that I have produced, but the act of writing it alone has – perhaps unsurprisingly – been lonely. The directionless movement that I have undertaken through the writing would now be better expressed, I feel, through connection with other bodies – what I have learned is that I would respond well to a more tactile, group orientated approach to healing from trauma. The group that I imagine, however, does not have to be a formal therapy group. What I suggest is a dynamic that would diffuse the prescriptive client-therapist relationship, in which therapeutic authority implicitly steers both talking-therapy techniques and diagnosis, in order to make room instead for participatory listening and expression (Haaken 1994, 138). And both listening and expression, I suggest, do not have to take place through talking alone, or even through talking at all. What I imagine in this space is a sort of telling without telling – it would not be about recounting stories that are subject to invasion of doubt of truth, but would instead be about incorporating all aspects of the messy reality of trauma through movement, and moving with the narrative as and when it changes.

I have always been known for really letting loose on the dancefloor. I've never had any formal dance training; I don't even know if I 'can' dance, and I don't really care, either. Even though it is a space where my visibility is at its highest, ironically, it is a space where my inhibitions are almost at their lowest. Moving to music, however off-beat or awkward I might look, just feels really nice to me. And, although I am not actually a very tactile person ordinarily, I enjoy connecting with others on the dancefloor – holding hands, stepping in (or out) of time together, and laughing. There is something in the process of movement that is incredibly cathartic. Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) is a formal application of this catharsis. It is a well-established alternative approach to talking-therapy, or what McCormack (2003, 491) describes as a "therapeutic landscape" that is orientated as "post-medical". DMP relies on improvised movement as a method of expression between client and therapist in order to explore either trauma or other identified psychological problems (see Karkou 2017 for a popular-academic overview of DMP; also Payne [1992] 2004; Levy 1988). It has been interesting to read about, having turned my attention to the literature in the last few weeks of this project, but it has been a little difficult to ascertain the dominant theoretical perspective – DMP as a discipline seems to straddle structuralist approaches (with discussions about mind-body integration), phenomenology, neuroscience, and some older literature framed by Jungian psychoanalysis. What is consistent, I have

found, is that the focus remains on trauma-as-pathology, with the conversations circulating around how (or to what extent) DMP is effective as a treatment, and trying to quantify how DMP "significantly" makes people feel better (see Brooks and Stark 1989; Koch *et al* 2019; Mills and Daniluk 2002). The approach to dance movement as a therapy technique that I imagine would seek to create distance from this. Although DMP is presented as exploratory (in terms of both dance technique and the structure of sessions), the routine therapeutic agenda of problem-requires-treatment is underlying, and there are gestures towards what constitutes 'positive' or 'negative' connections between dancers, with sessions being guided towards those assumptions using cues – for example, "positive comments were made by the therapist concerning interactions to be encouraged…'that looks like a nice cuddle'" (Payne [1992] 2004, 20). This is a limitation that McCormack (2003, 491) also notes, describing the concentration of DMP on representational aspects of verbal and somatic processes as making it more difficult to realise the capacity of DMP sessions as affective events.

What I would like to see is therapeutic dance improvisation that is more radically curious and exploratory. By this I mean it would be interesting for a dance-based approach to evolve that is removed from 'healing' as a forward-looking goal. This would enable a focus on bringing bodies into a conversation in which all of the idiosyncrasies of trauma are approached as symptoms not to be cured, but to be considered as constitutive of how trauma is actually lived out, and to find a space for it through embodied expression. The reason I foreground movement as a therapeutic technique is not just because I love throwing myself around on the dancefloor, but because I have found myself interested in and paying careful attention to the differences in everyday movement between myself and the sister-survivors that I have recently grown close to, and I wonder what could be produced – therapeutically – by mixing the two. I notice the ways that these friends move with and touch, or don't touch, me and others. One friend is markedly uncomfortable in busy spaces, and is slightly hesitant with physical connection – she says that she has had to 'learn how to hug', for example. Another friend describes herself as 'hyper' tactile and sexualised, and reports also a habitual process of grinding her hips at night when she is falling asleep. Noticing and finding out about these somatic nuances got me thinking about how the way we use our bodies, on our own and with others, can be considered *as* testimony of our trauma – a testimony that is not subject to doubt of truth. Dance movement, then – as I imagine it – could be an opportunity to express that testimony in a relational capacity. 'Healing' through dance would not be about foregrounding those movements in order to work through and eventually erase them – the expression of traumatic responses are so frequently suppressed or pathologised by trauma theory and therapeutic approaches. Instead, this iteration of healing would be about welcoming – through movement – impulses, tendencies, and fantasies, in order to think about how they contribute to our lives without the renunciation of them as peculiar or perverted.

I don't assume that what I suggest would be necessarily be an appropriate or welcome approach for all bodies. By way of closing, it is just something that I have thought about, and will think about more,

because it builds on my own love of dance movement, the interest that I have in the different intricacies of daily movement by the survivors that I know, and as part of a critical reflection on having used writing as a methodological commitment for this particular project. The writing *has* been movement, and has been a way for me to express – particularly through *Harriet* – many parts of my trauma that I have never really been able to find a voice for. But that voice has been a slightly lonely one, even with the sisterhood that I formed during the writing. I still have a lot to say, and there are many things that I have not yet had the nerve to say to anyone, so I see this project as having been a starting ground. The dance movement that I imagine would be an exploratory foundational base upon which to approach an open verbal conversation between willing bodies about our intimacies, our reservations, our daily practices, our sex-practices, and to think them in relation to our place in the worlds in which we live. The conversation wouldn't have to be anti-happiness or healing, but those terms would instead be negotiated differently by each body, shaped as we by our sexual trauma, but without being shaped or steered by trauma theory. And that is, I think, what I will take away from this – a desire to find others (more others) with which to stumble through and follow the sensations of trauma, together but singularly, and dancing wherever we can.

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